

# EXTEMPORARY ESSAYS

BY

MAURICE HEWLETT

HUMPHREY MILFORD

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

LONDON EDINBURGH GLASGOW COPENHAGEN

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ESSAYS

ESSAYS BY THE SAME WRITER

'IN A GREEN SHADE'

WILTSHIRE ESSAYS

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## 8 THE MAYPOLE AND THE COLUMN

Certainly, the parent of the Essay draped no maypoles with speech. Montaigne was a sedentary philosopher, of the order of the post-prandials ; a wine-and-walnuts man. One thing would open out into another, and one seem better than the other, at the time of hearing. ‘Je n’enseigne point ; je raconte,’ he tells you of himself ; and it is true. To listen to him is a liberal education ; yet you can hardly think of Montaigne footing it on the green. Bacon’s line, again, was the aphoristic. He shreds off his maypole rather than clothes it : but he has one set up. He can give his argument as witty a turn as the Frenchman when he pleases—‘There is no man doth a wrong for the wrong’s sake, but thereby to purchase himself profit, or pleasure, or honour, or the like. Therefore why should I be angry with a man for loving himself better than me ?’ That is the turn his thoughts take upon Revenge, and a fair sample of his way with an abstract idea—shredding off it all the time, getting down to the pith. But he can be very obscure : ‘A single life doth well with Churchmen ; for charity will hardly water the ground where it must first fill a pool.’ That is proleptic reasoning. We are to caper about the pole before the ornaments are on.

But since his time the Maypole has gone out of use. The modern essayist has had a column reared for him instead, which he is required, not to drape, but to fill. That kind of column is no symbol of the earth’s fertility, but too often the grave of it. It has been, however, the opportunity of the babbler, the prater, the prattler, and the agreeable rattle : all’s one to the Column so that it be filled. You may write on something, or nothing ; you may grind axes on your column, or roll logs on it. But you must fill it.

To be too long for it is nothing. There is the Procrustean sword. To be too short——Minotaur will howl for more.

Hazlitt is the typical journalist-essayist. He could fill a column with any man born, yet not with pure gain to literature. He makes an ungracious figure in history, un-social and anti-social too, with his blundering, uncouth loves, his undignified quarrels, and insatiable hatreds. His spleen engulfed him, and I have often wondered what our Wiltshire shepherds made of him, lowering like a storm about the coombes of Winterslow. None of the ‘pastoral melancholy’ of that grassy solitude shows in his writing, whose zest is that of hunger rather than wholesome appetite. Indeed, I don’t think he was a tolerable essayist. He was too eager to destroy, and the very moral of his own John Bull who would sooner, any day, give up an estate than a bugbear. How many people he hated, and how much! Whole nations at once—such as the French. He hated Southey and Gifford, and for their sakes the *Quarterly*, Pitt and Castlereagh, Byron and Coleridge. He was a fierce lover, too, but not comfortable in his loves. Sometimes he knew both passions for the same person. Burke, for instance: *Odi et amo*, he said of him. He had that bad symptom of the violent lover, that he could only honour his love at another’s expense. So Racine and Walter Scott must be trampled under foot before Shakespeare can be duly esteemed. There is consequently a sense of strain in reading Hazlitt which his fine raptures (and no writer soared more rapturously) can only overcome on select occasions. His account of Cavanagh the fives player is one, his essay on John Buncle another. For once, for twice, he was single-minded, and forgot to hurt anybody.

He learned length from the Reviews, which encouraged the essay to be a treatise, and has many a tedious page. Illustrations press upon him and cannot be refused. He has that trick of saying the same thing several times in slightly different ways which was common to all the essayists of his time, doomed to fill their columns. Procter, Leigh Hunt, and Lamb all did that—Lamb less tiresomely than any; for Lamb enhanced the image, or shifted it into happier view, with every addition. But Hazlitt left it where it was, or hid it.

Lamb was essayist first, and journalist with what remained over. A column was set up: he made it a maypole. No craftsman has draped his idea, or capered about it as Lamb did. He transfigures whatever he touches; more, he transmutes it. His seventeenth-century jargon, which you may find tiresome, is part of the fun. It is, so to speak, joco-serious with him. He is generally better without it, as in ‘Blakesmoor’ or ‘Barbara S——’, or ‘Dream-Children’; yet of all Elia the most beautiful thing to me is one which has Burton and Sir Thomas Browne all over it, ‘A Quakers’ Meeting’. There you have exactly what I mean by my overworked figure of the Maypole. A theme set up, and hung with loving art; then round about it a measure trodden, sedately for the most part, but with involuntary skips aside as the whim takes him. Lamb could not spare a joke even at a funeral; but this is sheer beauty, a serene and lovely close:

‘The very garments of a Quaker seem incapable of receiving a soil; and cleanliness in them to be something more than the absence of its contrary. Every Quakeress is a lily; and when they come up in bands to their

Whitsun conferences, whitening the easterly streets of the metropolis, from all parts of the United Kingdom, they show like troops of the Shining Ones.'

That is to do more than dance about a maypole. It is to dance before the Lord.

All the pieces which follow were written for and published in daily newspaper or weekly or monthly review : *The Times* and *Manchester Guardian*, *Nation* and *Outlook*, *Nineteenth Century and After*, *London Mercury*, *Cornhill*. Well or ill, they were intended to deck their column as if it had been a maypole. Rightly or wrongly, they were to be literature as well as journalism. Journalism loves the particular, but literature must hold fast to the general. Journalism accepts the ephemeral, gives you its daily screed in exchange for its daily bread ; but literature has its eye on posterity, expresses the spirit of fact rather than the body of it ; and its servants, if not exacting a monument more perdurable than brass, wish that they may get, and try to deserve it. Genius does what it must, and need not concern us here. Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* for hire, and Walter Scott *The Bride of Lammermoor*, that he might add field to field by Tweedside. They had their monument without a thought thrown that way. And Keats, who said that his name was writ in water ? Did he not know that it was writ in ink, which grows blacker with age ? But let the smaller man do consciously and with premeditation what his betters did by the Grace of God. No man needs be the worse journalist for taking immense pains to be something beside.

It is hard work. 'I never have a holiday. On Monday

towards noon I lift up my head, and breathe for about an hour; after that the wicket shuts again and I am in my prison cell for seven days.' So said Sainte-Beuve; and Matthew Arnold comments upon the saying, 'The *causeries* were at this price.' Hard work——but the only way to serve your two masters, turn your column into a maypole and pace out your dedicatory dance.

BROAD CHALKE,

*15th September 1922.*

## *W. H. Hudson*

### *Hail and Farewell*

SO far as you could love a man with whom your hours of free converse could be told on the fingers, and your correspondence paid for with a shilling, I loved Hudson. That only means to say that the short commerce I had with him enriched my regard for him, but did not cause it. Nor, though we had much in common—books of his which, as I read them, seemed to have been written directly for me, tastes and habits which coincided, a countryside shared—did I on such accounts love him. There was something else in his writings besides their matter—and that was himself. He was of those few authors who make themselves prized not for what they say, nor for their manner of saying, but for what they are. Hudson was of all the men I have ever known of the most radiant sincerity, and in the flesh proved to be so gentle, quiet, and candid, that you seemed to see the very soul of him, and how perfectly it consorted with its case. He reminded me of nobody so much as Dorothy Wordsworth, who must have been, within and without, of the same homogeneity. To love Hudson, therefore, or Dorothy Wordsworth, was to love moral beauty—which every one does when he sees it. But that is the difficulty. It is not at all easy to see. Well, in Hudson you could not fail of seeing it; and once seen, to see it again did not greatly matter. You knew it was there.

One of his best books was written about South Wilts., where I live ; and to write part of it he stayed in my village for some weeks, lodging with the blacksmith, and spending his days wandering in and out of the Downs. As I spent most of mine in the same manner I wonder that I did not meet him ; but I never did, nor knew that he had been there until, later on, I became acquainted with him. The book I mean is *A Shepherd's Life*, and is entirely occupied with the valleys of the Five Rivers which concentrate at Salisbury or thereby. The title is not a good one, for it is not so much the lives of the shepherds which he describes as the life of Hudson in a country of shepherds—in their broad grey downs and sheltered coombes, in their villages of hill and vale, in their markets and fairs, and in the ingles of their cottage hearths. He knew more of our birds than of our people. He sentimentalized the latter, the former not at all. His eye for the country was infallible and deeply appreciative, without being microscopic like Jefferies' or economico-philanthropic like Cobbett's. He wrote of it better than either. His harvest of it inhabits, informs the pages ; and as you read of something or other which interested him on his journey, the landscape unfolds itself quietly before you, so that when you look up from the thing of the moment, there are the downs with their flitting cloud-shadows and velvety flanks, there is the clump of beeches on the turf-rampart, there the valley with its elms and water-meadows about the slow river, and there a grey village in the midst, with a square-towered church—and the thing of the moment enacting itself there ! Our best prose has been of this quietist kind, doing its descriptive work by the way. Cobbett's landscape is better than Jefferies', but Hudson's is better than Cobbett's. It is

foolish work comparing two arts ; yet I feel like saying that while there was no Constable in Hudson's art, there was some David Cox, and a good deal of Old Crome. He has been likened to George Borrow as a writer, and with some truth. His art was as masterly, though much more charming, because he was so himself. There was a swashbuckler in Borrow.

It is difficult to believe that a man so much the master of himself, so much at ease in a world which must at many points have given him acute discomfort, had little or no sense of the ridiculous ; yet I have never been sure whether Hudson had it or not. *Green Mansions* alone might settle that. I don't read in that romantic tale that he had any notion how near the comic he sometimes conducted it. But then there is *The Purple Land*, in which the tender relations of the hero with damsel after damsel, each pining in her *estancia*, each comforted, and then left after a desperate farewell, are heightened to a point of irresistible comedy by the discovery that he has a wife awaiting him somewhere with whom he immediately resumes his philanderings at the end of his sentimental journey. The book, in fact, becomes a delightful farce ; but I should not care to assert that Hudson knew it, still less that he intended it. The tragic, of course, is there too. Some of the maidens were very forlorn indeed. Hudson must have been only too well acquainted with that. *El Ombù*, an earlier and a shorter study, is exceedingly tragic, and a masterpiece of descriptive writing, with the landscape itself, the sun-scoured land in which the doomed house stood and the doomed man agonized, an actor in the story. So Mr. Hardy gave Egdon Heath a part in *The Return of the Native*. There are masterly feats of the same kind in *Far*

*Away and Long Ago*, to the end of which, enchanted, you walk for some hours on the limitless Argentine plain. •But the great charm of that book is the self-unfolding of the writer. You cannot understand the peculiar quality of Hudson the man until you know Hudson the child.

He had a mentally afflicted wife, to whom he devoted himself, and for whose sake he lived in London a more secluded life than he would have lived on Salisbury Plain. She died, I think, last year; and then he went to Penzance, and I heard from him once or twice. I hoped he would have found in Cornwall what Cornwall Road, Bayswater, could never have given him. He has found it now, but not in Cornwall. They say that he died in his sleep—the very end so gentle and peace-loving a spirit had earned.

## *The Early Quakers*

QUALITY, which in such an art as painting is a thing infallibly recognized yet hard to be defined, is resident in all expressions of the spirit of man. In Letters we may call it style, and in religion, rather disagreeably, unction. One would certainly seek, and might easily find a less greasy term for that unmistakable, inexpressible something which seems to thrill in the words, which causes the sentences to dilate, open and shut (as it were) like the embers of a wood-fire, when they are used by a man ‘in the Spirit’, as it is written, ‘on the Lord’s day’. One reads what appears to be the too familiar account of conviction of sin, conversion, certitude of truth and what not. The well-known symptoms are there, the well-worn locutions lap them round. Yet a difference is discernible; there is a bloom, a dewiness, a—what? Infinite as are the variations in the characters and persons of men, so are those of sincere writing. Such things are worth finding out.

The Society of Friends has lately put forward what it calls the First Part of its Book of Discipline—‘Christian Life, Faith and Thought’ (Friends’ Bookshop, Bishopsgate), which is nothing less than a stream of testimony to the root of Quakerism, an anthology of its religious conversation from the Seventeenth Century onwards. It is closed only by the cover, for the stream is still flowing, and apparently with a strong tide. In this little book it is

possible, I think, to detect with some precision the quality of a faith which is as distinct from others as the practice of its adherents has always held them separate among Christians. Conversion, and the certainty of it, proceed, as I have said, upon familiar lines ; but in the result—and that is the first thing to note about it—in the result it turns to serenity rather than disturbance, to joy and not to savagery, to a still ecstasy if such a state can be. Zeal does not eat up the Quakers, but glows within them, steadily and mildly radiant.

George Fox himself strikes that note :

‘ As I had forsaken all the priests, so I left the separate preachers also, and those called the most experienced people. For I saw there was none among them all that could speak to my condition. And when all my hope in them and in all men was gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, oh then, I heard a voice which said, “ There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition ”, and, when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy. . . . Thus, when God doth work, who shall let it ? And this I knew experimentally.’

That joy never left him, in whatever tribulations he was afterwards involved. Presently, as he says, ‘ I saw all the world could do me no good ; if I had had a king’s diet, palace and attendance, all would have been as nothing : for nothing gave me comfort but the Lord by His Power’. The serenity which fills his diary as with fragrance impelled him to charitable judgement, but at the same time, as it fired his words, taught him to be frugal of them. The fewness and fullness of his words, William Penn said, struck all his hearers ; and yet—‘ The most awful, living, reverent frame I ever beheld, I must say, was his in prayer.’

He died as he had lived :

'Divers Friends came to visit him in illness, unto some of whom he said : "All is well ; the seed of God reigns over all, and over Death itself."

That is how to die—if you can.

What they had, Seed of God, or whatever—if I may put it so—was like a comfortable balance at the bank which tempted neither to profusion nor parsimony, but put the owner at peace with all the world. There would be no inclination to foppery in such a man : there was none in them. 'The bent and stress of their ministry', Penn says, 'was . . . a leaving off in religion the superfluous, and reducing the ceremonious and formal part, and pressing earnestly the substantial, the necessary and profitable.' One of the superfluities of life, as they found out early in the day, was blood-shedding. William Dewsbury, a Yorkshireman, bore witness to that :

'I joined that little remnant which said they fought for the Gospel, but I found no rest to my soul among them. And the word of the Lord came unto me and said, "Put up thy sword into thy scabbard ; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my children fight"—which word enlightened my heart and discovered the mystery of iniquity, and that the Kingdom of Christ was within, and was spiritual, and my weapons against them must be spiritual, the power of God.'

Yet, as he said, he 'never since playèd the coward', spending the greater part of his life cheerfully in prison. In New England they hanged for Quakerism, and many women suffered that death.

'Except ye become as little children.' That they could do. There again is part of the Quaker quality—simplicity

of reception of truth, simplicity of reaction to it. Margaret Fell of Swarthmore was the wife of a Judge of Assize, visited in her husband's absence on circuit by George Fox. That was in 1652. In 'Ulverston Steeplehouse', in her presence, Fox stood up and asked leave to speak. It was given him. He opened the Scriptures

'And said, "What had any to do with the Scriptures, but as they came to the Spirit that gave them forth. You will say, Christ saith this, and the Apostles say this; but what canst thou say? Art thou a child of Light, and what thou speakest, is it inwardly from God?" This opened me [says Margaret], so that it cut me to the heart; and then I saw clearly that *we were all wrong*. So I sat me down in my pew again, and cried bitterly. And I cried in my spirit to the Lord, *We are all thieves, we are all thieves.* We have taken the Scriptures in words and know nothing of them ourselves.'

A hundred years later that same divine childishness shows forth in another form, that of beautiful, naïve speech. Thomas Story (*obit 1742*) goes to the Friends' meeting at Broughton in Cumberland. Some one spoke—'yet I took not much notice of it . . . my concern was much rather to know whether they were a people gathered under a sense of the enjoyment of the presence of God in their meetings. . . . And the Lord answered my desire according to the integrity of my heart.'

'For, not long after I had sat down among them, that *heavenly and watery cloud overshadowing my mind brake into a sweet abounding shower of celestial rain*, and the greatest part of the meeting was broken together, dissolved and comforted in the same divine and holy presence and influence of the true, holy, and heavenly

Lord, which was divers times repeated before the meeting ended.'

That is very beautiful ; but Story was a poet. Observe the rhythm of this :

I was silent before the Lord, as a child not yet weaned ;  
He put words in my mouth ;  
And I sang forth his praise with an audible voice.

I called unto my God out of the great deep ;  
He put on bowels of mercy, and had compassion on me ;  
Because his love was infinite,  
And his power without measure.

He called for my life, and I offered it at his footstool ;  
But he gave it to me as a prey,  
With unspeakable additions.

There is more of that grave and measured descant, but its quality is in what I quote. It was in all those men and women. William Dent, another Yorkshireman, must not be left out. He was a country man. 'His Quaker garb was spotlessly neat. His face spoke of indwelling light and peace with all mankind. When words came they were few and weighty.' They certainly were.

'It is told how he would drive fourteen miles to a Friends' Meeting to worship. On one occasion he rose, and said, 'God is love', and then sat down again. It is believed no listener forgot that sermon.'

He should not. It was the whole thing in essence. It was all they knew, and all that they needed to know.

## *Shelley's Swan-song*

DROWNED at thirty, just a hundred years ago, Shelley had the lot in death which he had desired (and once, if not twice, sought), and, as it appears, no desire left in him for life. A day before the end—on Sunday, 7th July—he had said to Mrs. Leigh Hunt, ‘If I die to-morrow, I have lived to be older than my father: I am ninety years of age’. Not long before that, Trelawny, hunting for him in the Pineta of Pisa, was guided by a contadino ‘to a hat, books, and loose papers lying about, and then to a pool of dark, glimmering water’. ‘Eccolo’, said the peasant, and ‘I thought’, Trelawny goes on, ‘he meant that Shelley was in or under the water.’ He had reason to think it possible. The ensuing conversation, coloured though it may be by the narrator’s lively fancy, does not read like mere fiction. Shelley’s mood at the time was one of dejection; the sense of the words put into his mouth can be found in his letters and verses. ‘The river flows by like Time, and all the sounds of Nature harmonize; they soothe: it is only the human animal that is discordant with Nature, and disturbs me. It is difficult to conceive why or for what purpose we are here, a perpetual torment to ourselves and to every living thing. . . .’ Then he said, ‘Listen to the solemn music in the pine-tops—don’t you hear the mournful murmurings of the sea? . . . Their chorus is the eternal wailing of wretched men.’ When Trelawny here reminded him of the present wailing of Mary whom he had left at the edge of the wood,

he 'started up, snatched up his scattered books and papers, thrust them into his hat and jacket pockets, sighing "Poor Mary! hers is a sad fate. Come along; she can't bear solitude, nor I society—the quick coupled with the dead".' The whole record of those last few days of his on earth suggests that the 'will to live' was not in him; that he had 'o'er-informed the tenement of clay', burnt himself out; and that on the verge of a new emotional crisis, he did not feel that he had vitality enough left in him to carry it through.

• 'The day I found Shelley in the pine-forest', Trelawny says, 'he was writing verses on a guitar. I picked up a fragment, but could only make out the first two lines :

Ariel to Miranda : Take  
This slave of music . . .

It was a-frightful scrawl. . . .'

Shelley, in fact, was in a suicidal mood, prompted to it, it seems, very much by despair. Miranda was Jane Williams, whose Ferdinand was then in being. On the 18th of June this poor Ariel had written to Trelawny at Leghorn,

'You, of course, enter into society at Leghorn: should you meet with any scientific person, capable of preparing the Prussic Acid, or essential oil of bitter almonds, I should regard it as a great kindness if you could procure me a small quantity. . . . I would give any price for this medicine; you remember we talked of it the other night. . . . I need not tell you I have no intention of suicide at present, but I confess it would be a comfort to me to hold in my possession that golden key to the chamber of perpetual rest.'

Link to that letter, in order to understand it fully, his adventure with Jane Williams and her children in a skiff. He had rowed her out into deep water, there laid by the oars

and fallen into a brooding stare. ‘She had made several remarks, but they met with no response. She saw death in his eyes. Suddenly he raised his head, his brow cleared and his face brightened as with a bright thought, and he exclaimed joyfully, “Now let us together solve the great mystery.”’ He did in fact let them all into the water, but Jane had inveigled him before that into the shallows. It must have been a near thing, and should have shown her what she was playing with. But if he was incurable, so doubtless was she.

All these signals point to danger, and to one danger. Shelley was at the opening of a new emotional experience. Remembering its many forerunners, he may well have despaired. The last two of his letters in Mr. Ingpen’s collection are dated July 4, from Pisa. The first is to Jane Williams. He is urging Williams, he says, to sail with the first fair wind without waiting for himself:

‘I have thus the pleasure of contributing to your happiness when deprived of every other, and of leaving you no other subject of regret, but the absence of one scarcely worth regretting. I fear you are solitary and melancholy at Villa Magni, and, in the intervals of the greater and more serious distress in which I am compelled to sympathize here, I figure to myself the countenance which had been the source of such consolation to me, shadowed by a veil of sorrow. How soon those hours passed, and how slowly they return, to pass so soon again, perhaps for ever, in which we have lived so intimately, so happily! Adieu, my dearest friend! I only write these lines for the pleasure of tracing what will meet your eyes. Mary will tell you all the news.’

The second letter, to Mary, is precisely a letter of news. Shelley was incurable, knew it, and despaired. Atropos

had the thread in her fingers ; I suppose he had glimpsed the shears.

It is curious that his last considerable poem, like Keats's, should be tinged with Dante's strong wine. But while the revised *Hyperion* is coloured with the manner of the *Inferno*, *The Triumph of Life* has much more of its spirit. That rueful moralizing upon the vanity of things done under the sun reads strangely in a poet who had lived so entirely in the future : a future, no doubt, unsupported by any dogma but what youth and hope could supply ; scornful indeed of dogma, and as radiant a mirage as that youth itself had been. He had written in dejection more than once, but never like this. *The Triumph of Life*, which is equally that of Death, is a vision of disillusion. Who sat in the chariot which came 'on the silent storm Of its own rushing splendour' ?

### A Shape

So sate within, as one whom years deform,  
Beneath a dusky hood and double cape,  
Crouching within the shadow of a tomb.

Yoked to it the great men of that day and before it pass in a horde, 'a captive multitude' : Plato, Rousseau, Bacon, Voltaire, confusedly with 'Frederic, and Paul, Catherine and Leopold', and other such. He sees them go, and

‘Let them pass,’  
I cried, ‘the world and its mysterious doom  
Is not so much more glorious than it was  
That I desire to worship those who drew  
New figures on its false and fragile glass  
As the old faded.’

He joins the throng of captives, is stayed by no accident

of the road, crosses the glen through which they surge, and behold—

the grove

Grew dense with shadows to its inmost covers,  
The Earth was grey with phantoms, and the air  
Was peopled with dim forms....

He watches them closely, sees how some melt into nothingness like snow-flakes, others dance like gnats in a cloud, some sit chattering ‘like restless apes’, some, ‘more humble’, like falcons on the fist. The closer he looks the greyer his outlook: youth, hope, love itself, pride, strength—

From every form the beauty slowly waned ;  
From every firmest limb and fairest face  
The strength and freshness fell like dust, and left  
The action and the shape without the grace  
Of life....

The darkness gathered, the restless shapes wearied of their ghastly dance,

And fell, as I have fallen, by the wayside....

He ends upon a cry of amaze, a wounded note—

‘Then, what is life?’ I cried....

Said I not well it was his swan-song? It is tragic reading, tainted and dusty with death.

There is no philosophy behind this poem; it is not written on a large scale. It is a fragment, and must have remained so; for Shelley's buoyancy, which alone had sufficed so far to answer his questionings, was gone. With Ariel's power of the wing was gone, too, Ariel's office.

‘Call no man happy till he is dead.’ No, indeed, when he is the slave of his temperament.

## *The Wives of the Hag-ridden*

‘September 12, 1862.—I am in love, as I did not think it was possible to be in love. I am a madman; I’ll shoot myself, if it goes on like this. They had an evening party; she is charming in everything.’

Next day he proposed, ten days later ‘we were married in the royal church of the Nativity of Our Lady.’ ‘We’ were Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoi and Sophie Andreevna Bers. That citation from Tolstoi’s diary was made by his widow in her tragic *Autobiography*, now published in translation by the Hogarth Press.

It is a hasty, tempestuous, incomplete little volume, full to the covers with a sense of injury, lost to regret for the happy years in resentment at those of misunderstanding and estrangement; implying much more than it is able to express, charged with facts which are not fairly stated, bringing the writer’s griefs to a point, and then missing the point.

‘The difference between my husband and myself came about, not because *I* in my heart went away from him. It was *he* who went away, not in his everyday life, but in his writings and his teachings as to how people should live. I felt myself unable to follow his teaching myself. . . .’

That is her point, but not *the* point. That lies rather in a breach of promise implied. A young man of genius rushes a girl into marriage. She accepts him as he stands with open arms and a full heart. Nevertheless his genius lies between them in the marriage-bed, unsuspected by

either, and imperceptibly pushes them farther apart. When discovery comes, when their eyes are open and they can measure the gulf which separates them, is there not a breach, not of promise of marriage but of promise in it? He has grown, she has not. He, ridden and spurred by his hag, fleets far and wide over countries of the mind—moor and marsh, desert and tilth, forest and lake—of which she, sleeping in his arms, never dreams. They wake, they look at each other: she cannot read of his wild traverse in his eyes—the eyes are easily schooled. So the hag grows masterful and rides him finally to a pass where, to cross it, the truth must be told because it cannot be hidden. Can she not cry then, like any jilted girl of the people,

Sceglier fra mille un cuore,  
Da lei vol' farsi un nido;  
E poi trovarlo isfido  
È troppo gran' dolor'—?

Nobody can call it unreasonable, though every one feels that it is so. That is the paradox involved in our existence.

Trouble seems to have begun in '74-'75, when he lost two aunts and three young children. Tolstoi hunted for consolation; 'his seeking for truth became acute'. He contemplated hanging himself. From teacher to teacher, faith to faith he ran: there was none to show him any good. 'A spirit which rejected the existing religions, progress, science, art, family, . . . had been growing stronger and stronger in Leo Nikolaevich, and he was becoming gloomier and gloomier.' What he did presently find—ways and means of reducing life to its elemental terms—satisfied him for a while. The Countess did not, could not be expected to, sympathize with him.

'In the summer of 1884 Leo Nikolaevich worked a great deal on the land; for whole days he mowed with the peasants, and, when tired out, he came home in the evenings, he used to sit gloomy and discontented with the life lived by the family.'

His hag was remorseless, and made him cruel. 'At one time he thought of taking a Russian peasant woman, a worker on the land, and of secretly going away with the peasants to start a new life: he confessed this to me himself.' He did actually go away, with a sack on his shoulder, when his wife was about to be confined. But he came back: 'he was gloomy and said nothing to me.... I could never forget that terrible, bright June night.' If that is true, it is pitiful.

In the matter of unreasonableness there was not much to choose between this doomed pair.

'Once Leo Nikolaevich called me into his study and asked me to take over in full ownership all his property, including his copyrights. I asked him what need there was for that, since we were so intimate and had children in common. He replied that he considered property an evil and that he did not wish to own it. "So you wish to hand over that evil to me, the creature nearest to you," I said in tears. "I do not want it and I shall take nothing."

There's a quibble there, of course. The Countess did not consider property an accursed thing, and therefore, for her part, was not offered one. But Tolstoi quibbled too, for in handing over an accursed thing to his wife and children he was not ridding himself of it. Nor was he necessarily leading a simple life because he ate black beans out of a basin and did not dress for dinner. It is all very childish, or would be if there were not a tragic reality behind it.

'Nobody and nothing satisfied Leo Nikolaevich or put his mind at rest. . . . It was as though his inner eye was turned only to evil and suffering, as though all that was joyful, beautiful, and good had disappeared. I did not know how to live with such views. I was alarmed, frightened, grieved. *But with nine children I could not, like a weather-cock, turn in the ever-changing direction of my husband's spiritual going away.*'

The italics are mine, designed to emphasize the fact that, with nine children, quibble as you will and give point for point, the issue is practical and not to be avoided.

At the end of this unhappy little book are some extracts from Tolstoi's papers, not so much justificatory as recriminative. He writes—most unfortunately, to his daughter—of perpetual spying, eavesdropping, incessant complaining, ordering me about . . . constant managing, pretended hatred of the man who is nearest and most necessary to me,' and so on. There was no pretence about the Countess's feelings towards Chertkov—but what are we to believe? The poor lady had exhausted herself with service. She had had thirteen children, of whom nine lived. Chertkov may have been necessary to Tolstoi, and her jealousies unwarrantable. But there they were, and, again, not unreasonably. The impression left by my reading is that Chertkov did make mischief, did make bad worse, and at the end, when the old man was dying, seems to have acted with incredible barbarity to his wife of fifty years' standing. I forbear to quote Tolstoi's own account of his 'escape', as he felt it to be. It should be read by the married. One human touch, however, I must record. He wrote it in the train on his last journey.

' . . . now we are in the train; we start. . . . The fear passes. And pity for her rises in me, but no doubt

at all that I have done what I ought to do. Perhaps I am wrong to justify myself—not Leo N. T., but that which at times exists, though ever so feebly, in me. . . .'

That goaded thing was free for the moment of its hag-rider when Tolstoi penned his pity.

There are diversities of hags, but the same spirit in the ridden. I wrote of Shelley's case just now. He was a hag-ridden man. And Carlyle! The Chertkov of that story was Lady Ashburton, whose relation to himself, at the cost of his wife, Carlyle never was able to iustify. Froude in *Letters and Memorials* (ii. 273) quotes a letter from Geraldine Jewsbury which puts Mrs. Carlyle's grievance as forcibly as possible. The two cases, nevertheless, differ widely. Mrs. Carlyle would have been happy, perhaps, if she had had children; the Countess, perhaps, if she had not. Tolstoi had been gently bred and did his best to become a boor. Carlyle *was* a boor, and his wife had known it from the beginning. But tactless as the Sage of Craigenputtock was, I doubt if he could ever have been guilty of an act so gross as that of sharing with a daughter his charges against her own mother. Carlyle may have had no sensibilities—but had Tolstoi no heart?

## *The De Morgans*<sup>1</sup>

SERIOUS intention has combined with happy memories to make Mrs. Stirling's Memoir of William and Evelyn De Morgan a beautiful book. For the De Morgans were lovely in their lives and in death not long divided. Few such wedded pairs have shone, like a constellation, upon a naughty world. No doubt but there are plenty of them with a more local beam. But such households are hidden from the main of us. We may come upon them—to pursue the figure—unawares when we are groping in the dark: a mild and steady radiance illuminating some inches of a mossy bank. But the De Morgans shone above the hiving streets. One could steer by them, if need were. And one did. There, beyond these voices, there was peace. The book therefore preserves a valuable thing. It might easily have been spoiled in the doing; yet because it has been done with great simplicity, it could hardly have been better done.

De Morgan had a happy childhood and youth, with a dry but essentially humane father for leading-light. Professor Augustus De Morgan, whose careful portrait will be discerned in the Professor Thorpe of *Joseph Vance*, bequeathed certain qualities to his son which were more to be desired than much fine gold, and incidentally brought it him. Steadiness of temper was one, intellectual honesty was another, and a lambent humour which played about the surfaces of things and illuminated them often to the

<sup>1</sup> *William De Morgan and his Wife*, by A. M. W. Stirling.  
(Butterworth.)

deeps—that was a third. Tuberculosis haunted his family ; one by one his younger children left him. Wanting the consolation of the orthodox, he had thought out the chances for himself, and had tabled the *pro et contra* with unflinching candour and a good deal of wit :

‘A strong and practical conviction of a better and higher existence’, he wrote to his old friend, Sir John Herschel, ‘reduces the whole thing to emigration to a country from which there is no way back, and no mail packets, with a certainty of following at a time to be arranged in a better way than I can do it.’

Within a short time of writing that he received—to use his own trope—his ticket.

‘During the last two days of his life his son William, watching by him, observed that he seemed to recognize the presence of all those of his family whom he had lost by death—his three children, his mother and sister, all of whom he greeted audibly, naming them in the reverse order to that in which they had left this world.’

And then, in his will, he thus proclaimed his belief :

‘I commend my future with hope and confidence to Almighty God ; to God the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, whom I believe in my heart to be the Son of God, but whom I have not confessed with my lips, because in my time such confession has always been the way up in the world.’

The italics would have been mine if they had not been Mrs. Stirling’s, for the words are as strongly characteristic of the son as they were of the father. William De Morgan talked and wrote like that. He was more of a Christian than he would ever have confessed himself, and his pre-occupation with the soul’s destiny is manifest in every book of his.

To such a father, who both saw and put the facts of this life in a dry light, William's determination to be an artist could not be a matter of enthusiasm. He did no more, however, than apply frequent cold douches, and when he found that the young man's heart was set, having it, as he requested, 'after a fortnight's delay, in writing', he gave it up with the final prophetic advice, William says, 'to read hard, especially the classics, and I should one day write well'. 'But I', he adds, 'must needs be an artist'. And so he was—first at the Academy Schools, then very easily and desultorily, in Soho and Bloomsbury, until he drifted into the acquaintance and ultimate friendship of Burne-Jones and Morris; then into glass-painting; finally into pottery, at which he laboured long and (in all respects but one) successfully. Last of all, and through those means, he found the predestined companion of his rest of days. He was forty, a staid and apparently rooted celibate. Evelyn Pickering, a good deal his junior, the wild one of a settled upper-class family, had burned like a meteor across all the conventions of Grosvenor Street and Bryanston Square, and found her orbit in another heaven than theirs. She also 'must needs be an artist', stole her first hours of work, stormed her way into the Slade, went out to Italy by herself, half-starved in Rome, came home to studio-life and a latch-key, and presently met her appointed other artist at a fancy-dress ball in Chelsea, where she had described herself as 'a tube of rose madder', and he as 'madder still'.

'The new acquaintance was clinched in typical fashion. Perturbed at the perversity of a glove which refused to be buttoned, he at length turned despairingly to his partner. 'If you will button my glove for me', he pleaded, 'I

will give you one of my pots.' The bargain was struck, the glove was buttoned, the pot accepted, and the comradeship cemented for all time.'

How happy a comradeship, how profitable, delightful to witness, encouraging to know about, Mrs. Stirling's book is here to declare. Evelyn De Morgan was a sound artist of the Pre-Raphaelite tradition, cryptic, allusive, full of symbolism and all sorts of emotional urgencies with which art perhaps has little to do. Yet she served Beauty all her days; and if some of that which she saw and served was not of this, or any, world, so much the worse, I dare say, for this, and any, world. She was in her way a mystic, shrank from exhibition, and (says Mrs. Stirling) kept certain of her pictures by her, not as unsaleable, but as not for sale. It is certain that she was both help and inspiration to her husband. The best thing he ever did in pottery was of her modelling. The bust of Pan is a fine and strong piece of work. Donatello need not have scorned it. I don't remember to have seen it in exhibition, where it should have been, or should be.

When the pottery failed him, having exhausted his store of health, and his wife's and his own store of money too, at the age of sixty-five De Morgan commenced novelist. *Joseph Vance's* origin is like *Waverley's*:

'In 1901, during a spare hour, he had written two chapters of a novel, "just to see what I could do", he explained subsequently. "I always loved grubby little boys, and I thought I should like to write a story of a grubby little boy. I began and got interested in him. But when I read over what I had written, I was so little impressed with the result that I nearly burnt it; in any case I put it away in a drawer and forgot all about it. Later in the year, when we were going out to Florence, it

accidentally came with us among a great mass of business papers.' . . . Shortly afterwards De Morgan was ill in bed, suffering ostensibly from influenza, but principally from the unwonted idleness which filled him with depression and sapped his vitality. Evelyn took the piece of manuscript to him and laid it by his bedside, with a pencil temptingly adjacent. "I think something might be made of this", she said briefly. When she looked in softly half an hour later he had started on the occupation which he was never again to abandon, and was writing rapidly.'

Its success astonished and delighted him. He was not at all prepared for it. 'My book was written in the serenest independence an author can enjoy, to wit, a total disbelief in ultimate publication. I never considered the feelings of my reader for a moment—nor his eyesight.' After it, and the ensuing fuss made about him, it had been much to expect that he should be able to continue that happy, amateur way of writing. Yet he did it with extraordinary ease. Once only, I think, did he repeat himself, when he renewed in, *A Likely Story*, one of the motifs of *It Never Can Happen Again*.

His bonnet, no doubt, was duly furnished with its bee. Every novelist, more or less, is a Mr. Dick. What would have happened to Trollope if nobody had told him of King Cophetua? What would Dickens have done if nobody had ever been cruel to a child? How would Dumas have enjoyed himself without a man who could play the God? In De Morgan's case it only means that certain vistas of life, the shadowy border-country, for instance, between life and the Beyond, with the cloudy company waiting there, were always in his view. Life itself, all life, was his subject; he scorned nothing, overlooked nothing, relished

everything. In all that he resembled Dickens, on whose shoulders he stood for his take-off. He had Dickens's knack of getting behind every character in turn, and so of giving depth and personality even to the supers on his scene. But he rarely caricatured, was nothing of a cartoonist. He made no monsters—Quilps, Creakles, Squeerses; no bigheads—Mrs. Gamps, Joey Bagstocks, Cousin Feenixes; and while he had more true humour than Dickens, he had less vitality, lower spirits, a slyer sense of fun. You don't crack your sides over De Morgan; you chuckle. Capt'n Cuttle, so far as he goes, is in the Falstaff tradition. Jim Coupland comes nowhere near either. He is a human being. Lizerann is beyond Dickens's reach. De Morgan had the artist's restraint. He could be tender without being mawkish: that was where humour served him. Mrs. Steptoe does not fill the stage like Mrs. Gamp. But do, or should, Mrs. Steptoes fill the stage? For a pair of portraits at full length, incomparably better than anything of the sort in Dickens, let me put forward Charlotte Eldridge, a masterpiece, and Marianne Challis, perfectly true, perfectly reasonable, extremely comic, and extremely touching, all at once. Challis, her husband, is a failure. If you take a novelist for your hero you are inviting failure. Judith Arkroyd is let off too easily. But I don't know any book of Dickens's which gives such a sense of real life as *Joseph Vance* and *It Never Can Happen Again*.<sup>\*</sup> It is rash to predict longevity for work of our own day—which, in a sense, his was not—but I know no imaginative prose literature which has more certitude of it than De Morgan's. Wisdom, surely, has found her an house there.

## *Poetic Relativity*

I REMEMBER very well being in the shop of the late Mr. Elkin Mathews—and let me here lament the loss of so kind a friend of the poets and so true a lover of their mystery—on some occasion of mine many years ago, and alone in it except for an attendant clerk, when there entered to us a tall and serious young man in a brown ulster and broad-brimmed felt, a portfolio under his arm. He inquired for Mr. Mathews, not of me but of the attendant who was hovering near. Mr. Mathews, he was told, was not within at the moment, but—what name should he say? The young man immediately drew himself up. Tall by nature, he seemed now to tower. ‘I am a poet’, he said, and took off his hat. Then he added with savage pride, ‘And what’s more, I am the only poet this year who has made poetry pay.’ Upon that he turned his back upon us, left the shop, and I saw him, like great Orion, sloping grandly to the West, his hat still in his hand. My companion caught my eye, and (I believe) winked his own. ‘Satisfied!’ he said. ‘They are like that.’ Yes, they are like that.

The ‘sudden glory’ which came upon that youth as he announced, not his forensic but his incondite self, is the symptom of a steadier glow, one which I think to be peculiar to the poetic calling, and by no means only to those who do it credit. The servants of the Fine Arts seem not to know it. I doubt whether the architect or the painter treads the ways of this world as if they were Milky Ways.

The novelist may think snugly of himself, and some of them have excellent reasons ; but those are personal reasons. His view is likely to be that he ennobles rather than is ennobled by his profession. He never, so far as my knowledge goes, has predicted immortality for himself. The poet has often done so, and more frequently believed it. And that belief, or that assertion, may have been entirely independent of the excellence or otherwise of his poetry. Wordsworth had no more doubt of his poetical than of his personal immortality, and justly. But Southey had none either, of his.

‘If Gifford could see me by this fireside,’ he wrote to his friend Bedford, ‘he would see a man . . . working hard and getting little—a bare maintenance and hardly that ; writing poems and history for posterity with his whole heart and soul ; one daily progressive in learning, not so learned as he his poor, not so poor as proud ; not so proud as happy. Grosvenor, there is not a lighter-hearted nor a happier man upon the face of this wide world.’

A letter, surely, none the less gallant, none the less noble, and none the less sincere for the fallacy upon which it rests. He wrote poems for posterity, to which posterity has had nothing to say ; poems which, it is likely, were forgotten before his honourable and laborious life went out in total eclipse. They are not so positively bad as merely negligible. No matter. He shrank from no comparison on their account. John Rickman found fault with *Madoc*, but Southey was not at all hurt. He even confessed to a blemish or two. Then he said :

‘Having confessed thus much, I ought to add, that the poem is better than you think it . . . compare it with the *Odyssey*, not the *Iliad* ; with *King John* or

*Coriolanus*, not *Macbeth* or *The Tempest*. . . . As far as I can see, with the same eyes wherewith I read Homer and Shakespeare and Milton, it is a good poem and must live.'

An astounding profession which can throw glory, like dust, in a man's eyes! 'Must live', he says, not 'should live'. And then, *Madoc* and the *Odyssey*—alas, my brother! But, as Mr. Mathew's young man said, 'They are like that'.

It follows, I think, or it may be inferred at least from those examples, that the certainty of fame resides in the pride of the profession of poet, not in the vanity of the individual. And, after all, is it so soon to be dismissed? You never can tell. These are early days to be sure of Southey, or of Hayley either. *Madoc*, or *The Triumphs of Temper* may yet revive. Shakespeare, we know, predicted highly of himself, and happens to have been right. Yet his fame was a long time on the road. Fuller, in 1670, included him as a Worthy of Warwickshire, thinking that in him 'three eminent poets may seem in some sort to be compounded'—which is a very guarded judgement. His three were Martial (but only as having a warlike name, like Shakespeare), Ovid as 'the most natural and witty of all the poets', and Plautus, 'an exact comedian yet never any scholar, as our Shakespeare (if alive) would confess himself'. He continues, 'Add to all these that though his genius generally was jocular and inclining him to festivity, yet he could (when so disposed) be solemn and serious.' So much for the author of *Lear* in 1670. Not extravagant praise. Fuller did not even know the year of his death; he left it blank. Pepys treated him with equal freedom. He thought many of his plays 'silly' and probably preferred

Sir George Etherege. May not such facts as these have encouraged Hayley, supposing him to have needed encouragement?

It is not so surprising, then, that the critical faculty is uncertain in the poets. If you excuse them for being blind to their own faults, even for believing them to be merits, you must not expect a more reasonable judgement of the work of their friends. Landor thought Southey sure of an eternity of fame, while he was much more cool in his estimate of Wordsworth. But Landor, perhaps, was not of a critical quality. Gray certainly was. Yet Gray took an infinity of pains with Mason, took him much more seriously, for instance, than Collins. And Collins is now with Gray; and where is Mason? Walpole, who detected Chatterton for a cheat, never did for a poet. He happened to be both, and as a poet he lives. But one might go on so for ever, and be both right and wrong in drawing conclusions. I feel safe only in saying that a good poet may know how good he is, but rarely how bad; and that a bad poet always thinks he is not so bad.

Nor does it in the least matter to his happiness (which is the great thing, after all) how bad or how good he is. The sense of vocation, the uplifting, the sting of the *aestrus*, the consecration and the dream; the power, the glory, the wings, the all-discerning eye; the pangs of gestation and birth; the sympathy, laughter and tears; the bleeding heart, soaring head, labouring bosom—all these the worst poet in the world shares with the best. There lies his reward, whether he makes poetry pay or not. And, as for the scoffing world, I have a tale about that, none the worse for being a true one. A friend of mine met a poet one day in the entry of a club. I suppose, if every one had his

rights, he might claim to be the worst poet in England, if not in Europe. He had in his hand, when my friend met him, the number of a Review in which, as was notorious, he had been treated as Apollo treated Marsyas. 'Ah', said my friend, 'I see that you know the worst'. The victim struck the offending quire with his free hand. 'That', he said, 'should never have been written.' They are like that.

## *The Iberians*

SIR ARTHUR KEITH, a distinguished man of science, and not the less so for being a man of imagination, reported the other day at some length upon the skull of Sir Thomas Browne. His millimetric scale enabled him to presume Iberian or Mediterranean lineage for the illustrious doctor, advancing upon which he opened, very tentatively (as is the scientific way), a new road of travel for the explorers of our idiosyncrasy. The line of his argument would seem to be something of this kind. It is true that we English, with every other European nation, are of mixed descent, and that into our production have gone Celtic and Nordic strains ; but the base, so to speak, of the brew is Mediterranean ; and it is to that, and its reactions in the other interbreeding races, that we must look if we desire to account for the specific quality of the British genius. It is the rash act of an amateur to enlarge professional nods and becks, but I hope I do him no wrong.

We know nothing, or almost nothing, of our neolithic ancestry, but that they were here, were never extirpated, and can be traced to-day. We know how they maintained themselves, sheltered themselves, and buried each other. We believe them to have been sun-worshippers, skilled in the courses of the stars ; we think that they were small, long-headed people, dark of skin, grey in the eye. We can detect those features easily still in the south-west, more sparsely in the south-east, rarely in the midlands. We have no traces left of their speech, unless the root of the word

*Britain* is the root of other race-names like Aquitaine and Lusitaine, and also an aboriginal root.<sup>1</sup> That is not much to go upon ; yet it is all. The rest is postulate or inference. We put it generally that no race was ever exterminated by invaders ; and I should like to put it on my own account that if physical characteristics can persist through many successive invasions, so must moral characteristics, depending as they do much upon tradition. Is it possible to over-rate the persistence of tradition, or too much to say that it can hardly be distinguished from instinct ? I would not go so far as a natural philosopher did the other day, who saw in the nurse's familiar reproach, ' You little monkey ', a recollection of our supposed original, but should not be afraid to suggest that in custom and locution, in nursery rhyme and game lie hidden modes of being which can be traced back to the very roots of our history. The first things which a child hears its mother say or sing are precisely those which that mother, herself a child, learned from hers. And so we can work backwards, as I believe, to Britons who were here before Stonehenge was, and might conceivably have seen the last of the glaciers. Tradition of that sort, lap-lore, would be as certainly derived through the mother as, it appears, the stature, form, and colouring of our latter-day peasantry are derived. Tradition, unconscious memory—which now is this ? A country-woman, writing to me the other day about the troubles of a friend

<sup>1</sup> The learned Dr. Sayce has suggested that certain of our words of unknown or of no etymology—*dog*, *pig*, *boy*, *girl*, he gives—are neolithic survivals. In 'structure', he adds, on the authority of Professor Bréal, 'no comparative philologist would imagine our language to be Indo-European'. Some one should compare English and Basque in these particulars.

of hers, said of her, ‘She had a good husband too, *one that looked out for her*’. Not, observe, ‘looked after her’. ‘Looked out for her.’ I hope it is not too fanciful to trace that locution back to the pit-dwelling on the hill-top, to the dyked enclosure and the borstal and the mist-pool!

But when Sir Arthur Keith suggests that we may be able to account for the quality of Sir Thomas Browne’s genius, and by inference that of other great men of ours, by his Mediterranean descent, there are difficulties which do not confront us when we lay to that far lineage the outstanding moral quality of the peasantry. Aesthetic quality would not so easily be accounted for by tradition. And it would be necessary to presume a peasant origin for Sir Thomas; for it is a matter of certainty, surely, that while extirpation did not await our aborigines, two other fates did—servitude for the men and concubinage for the women. I don’t see how that can be doubted. It is therefore only in the peasantry that Iberian descent can be certainly presumed. And even if Sir Thomas was come of a peasant stock which had gone up in the world, it would be difficult to prove the same fact of all our poets. Yet it would be as easy to show a specific aesthetic quality in our literature as a specific moral quality in our peasantry.

I am the more interested in Sir Arthur’s report because scientific acceptance of the persistence of Iberian quality affords me reasonable support for the statement which I made (in a book of serious intention), that the English have always been, and are now, in reality two nations, a dominant conquering race, and a conquered one, which have never coalesced. I called them then the Norman and the English, but think now that it would be better to call them the English and the British. English and Normans, aristocracy

and middle-class, are by this time one people. The Public Schools, the Services and the Professions have seen to that. But the more we know of the peasantry the more separate they seem to be. Their outlook is different, their moral habit, temperament, intellectual habit. Race and tradition will account for it.

Such a state of things is, to me, a matter of great interest. To live familiarly, as I do, with the possessors of such a venerable inheritance thrills me. But it has its inconvenient side. Some friends of mine enjoyed the services of a valued and charming maid. She had been with them for many years, had made herself necessary to their comfort, and seemed as happy to impart as they were to receive it. Through all the vicissitudes of domestic fortune which most of us have had to undergo of late she only had remained constant; and they had learned to count upon her. Quite suddenly, then, she said that she must leave. She was needed at home; it was urgent. Nothing could stay her, she must go. And she did. Next day the only two servants remaining in the house, a man and wife, silently flitted in the small hours (not without plunder), and the household was derelict—as I may say, marooned upon its own hearth. Now the point is that that charming, graceful, resourceful, and apparently faithful girl had known of the intention of the evil pair, and while she was forbidden by all the laws of her nation from warning her employers of it, was clear in her own mind that she was not prepared to cope singlehanded with a largeish establishment. So she had gone, leaving my friends to their fate. The remedy of the conquered race! I pointed it out, showed how interesting it all was, to my friends. But they didn't see it.

## *The Ballad-touch*

THE *Beggar's Opera* itself is a decadent night's entertainment, spiced for jaded appetites, like devilled bones after a revel ; and the songs in it, which were all composed for extant airs, are at least as provocative by their contrast with them as by their accord. Most of the airs are simple country things, ballads, jigs, rounds, catches, and so on, soft recorders of homely and material pleasures ; but most of the lyrics to which they are made to lend themselves are of the sophisticated logic of the Restoration, concerned with sentiment rather than experience; generalities about women and wine and such-like :

If the heart of a man is depress'd with cares,  
The mist is dispell'd when a woman appears ;

or

If love the virgin's heart invade,  
How like a moth the simple maid  
Still plays about the flame !—

reflections which certainly commit one to nothing very definite. Really, it is all belated Charles II, just the thing for Mr. Pepys, who loved good music and fine women, but loved thinking about them at least as much as dealing with them. Knipp would have made a saucy Macheath—and how Nell Gwynn would have brought down the house with 'Before the barn-door crowing !' Polly, to be sure, belongs to a more wholesome tradition. She is new. It was Polly—in other words, heart—no acquaintance of the seventeenth century's, which saved *The Beggar's Opera* for posterity, as the plays of Dryden and Congreve and

the rest of them have not been saved. I do not know that any work of literary art in which heart has not entered has survived its day. *The Beggar's Opera* is as good an example as one could want of that saving grace. Many wittier plays have been seen on the London boards, and many more suggestive; but their glitter and inuendo have not availed them. What, indeed, of the whole wordy seventeenth century has kept the stage but Shakespeare?

Apart from their music Gay's songs are little worth, for the simple reason that being of the head rather than the heart they have nothing worthy to report. General statements will not make poetry, which must proceed upon facts, things done or suffered. So it is that the ballad is the true lyric in the historic sense that to illuminate narrative was the first office of the lyre. Children dancing in a ring will be near enough for the beginning of lyrical poetry, whether singing because they were dancing, or the other way about, doesn't greatly matter. Nonsense words, to which no one could help mopping and mowing—'Lillum-wham, Lillum-wham', or Jaques's 'Ducdamé, ducdamé, ducdamé'—presently gave way to sense; and the sense was narrative because, before men had sentiments they had experiences, before they thought about things (and long before they thought about feeling them) they felt them. Fact was then the main business of life, as it is not now: fact past, present, or to come. Neither tense nor mood could impeach narrative; for as things have happened to us, so they will. So it is that Shakespeare can cast narrative into the imperative, or forecast it into the future:

Take, O take those lips away . . . .

or

What shall he have that killed the deer?

No doubt but the songs with which Shakespeare be-jewelled his Comedies were fitted to airs ready made. The learned will know, but I am not myself aware that any of them have survived. All's one for that, since they sing themselves. Counting in the fragments, such as those heartbreaking snatches of Ophelia's, or those with which Edgar and the Clown add to the mad humours of the wind-swept *Lear*, there are more than forty of them altogether, and it is a noteworthy thing that all but two or three are concerned with fact. Juno and Ceres in the Masque of *The Tempest* promise blessing by and large; and perhaps Hymen's song in *As You Like It*, 'Wedding is great Juno's crown', and that gracious interlude, 'Tell me where is Fancy bred', which is sung while Bassanio is choosing his casket, make some approach to the generalizing of experience. I don't think there are any others which are not in the narrative vein, or which do not deal with the affairs of men and maids, flowers and bees and birds, as we find each other in this our life. The eight songs in *The Tempest* turn the play into a fairy opera, and all but one glorify life as we know it. From the sparkle and salt spray of 'Come unto these yellow sands' we turn to hear the passing-bell of 'Full fathom five', and then—how like life!—we crash into the rollicking chorus,

The master, the swabber, the boatswain and I;  
and end with 'Where the bee sucks'! Heavenly, or rather earthly entertainment; entertainment for the Earthly Paradise. *As You Like It* has six, if not seven, songs in it; and *Cymbeline*, which is a very rhetorical, difficult play, of rough versification and more parentheses to its length than any other, contains two of Shakespeare's perfect lyrics—'Fear no more', which to my mind has but one equal,

and ‘Hark, hark ! the lark’, a lovely, fresh thing which makes the mouth of Cloten golden for the moment. Think again of *The Beggar’s Opera* in that connexion, and imagine the kind of *aubade* Filch would have made of it :

Press her, caress her,  
With blisses and kisses,

or some such apophthegm of erotic philosophy.

I am comparing small things with great, for in art, perfection is the staple by which all must be tested ; but the truth seems to be, as I have suggested, that you cannot make good lyrical verse, which will sing, out of generalizations, erotic or other. I don’t mean, of course, that you cannot fit words to tunes, because Gay did that happily enough : rather I mean that the singing quality must be in the content as well as in the words. It is the heart that must indite the good matter ; and far though the cast may be I believe that we must reach forward to Burns to find Shakespeare’s equal in song :

O wha my babie-clouts will buy ?  
Wha will tent me when I cry ?  
Wha will kiss me where I lie ?  
The rantin’ dog the daddie o’t.

That is in a Shakespeare vein, and in a ballad vein, as unpremeditated and as artless as the song of the chaffinch, having the irresistible flow, the singing, dancing quality which can only spring from the wedding of fact and heart. You get exactly the same touch in the ballad, which is the expression of the lowliest of us :

The wind doth blow to-night, my love,  
A few small drops of rain :  
I never had but one true love,  
In cold grave she was lain.

How exactly the very grain of that is in Shakespeare !

He is dead and gone, lady,  
He is dead and gone ;  
At his head a grass-green turf,  
At his heels a stone.

And in Burns too : the same matter, the same gush of sound ; like a bird singing in a brake. And after those two, Heine. And that's about all.

## *The ‘Facts’*

THE old definition of Poetry, that it is a branch of literature which ‘states the facts and rhymes in places’, comes into mind when reflecting upon the evil days which have befallen the Sublime—that high Sublime of which Longinus discoursed with such sagacity, and Burke with such a want of it. It is badly blown upon, that ‘big Bow-wow’, as Sir Walter called it. It has a kind of taste which the Georgian poets cannot away with. The reaction has been sharp, not to say astringent. For whereas the Sublime stated too few facts and rhymed in too many places, now we have no rhymes at all, and the facts thrown out with a shovel. To walk through the neo-Georgian page is to set one longing for the steam-roller upon it, to set one sighing for the good easy travelling of the ’seventies and ’eighties, when you could glide down quires of Swinburne or William Morris on rivers of smooth iambics or brisk tidal freshets of anapaests. Yet it is not to be wondered at. We have suffered a surfeit of uplifting. The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge. No later ago than the ’nineties there was an Ossianic revival. Fiona Macleod was the forensic name of a bard who, in private life, was a gentleman, a burly man of letters, of wide reading, and a great deal of wit. That he found a market for his vaporous highland rhetoric can have surprised nobody more than himself; but he found a very good market indeed, and came in, as they say, on the top

of it. That is what, even in our day, an ingenious Oriental has also done ; so true it is that there will always be readers who demand of literature an anodyne rather than a stimulant. But what proved to be fatal to Fiona Macleod was her daring the ordeal of the theatre. You may drug yourself with written words until you fall happily asleep : on the stage something must happen. On Fiona's nothing did until the middle of the second act, and what happened then was final. I well remember sitting through her play, mostly in literal, and quite in figurative, darkness. The auditorium was like night, the stage crepuscular. Keen blasts of air blew from it ; dim grey shapes flitted moaning about it, talking of the weather and lifting up their arms. One did not know what else they talked of, unless it was mythology ; but I remember that they did nothing else. It seemed that one had been sitting there for weeks before the end came—and the end was this. In a lull of the flitting and talk, a distraught old man in a white beard stood forward and blinked at us. Then he smote himself upon the forehead once or twice, saying, 'Wind, wind, nothing but wind !' and looked very much surprised when the whole audience rose at him, roaring unquenchable laughter—which was the end of the play. Against false sublimity of the kind the neo-Georgians are protesting now with chunks of ugly and unrelated facts.

The eighteenth century, when it took hold of the Sublime and ran it hard, was exceedingly unsuited to deal with any such thing. Taste, which had been its safest possession, then deserted it. Gray, with as cool a judgement in art as you could have wished for, was much bitten with Ossian, which to us is so much woolwork ; but Gray himself had produced some warrantable specimens of the false

sublime. There is no difference in kind, only in degree, between 'The Bard' and 'The Sisters', and the vapid impersonations of Mason, or the 'big Bow-wow' of Sir Walter Scott. From Gray's time, indeed, until Wordsworth's real sublimity disappeared in a flood of insincere, frothy stuff which had no purpose in art at all but to produce—which, whatever it did then, it now does not—a frame of mind in the reader who, it was believed, could be moved and uplifted less easily by facts than by qualifications of them. It would not be untrue to consider the literary period of 1750–1800 as the reign of the adjective—a reign whose path was made smooth and its way straight by the study of Longinus and the sophistications of Burke. The Greek had desiderated elevation of thought, and believed it could be induced by inflation of language; Burke saw the root of sublimity in terror, and laid it down that 'to make anything very terrible obscurity seems in general to be necessary'. He may be excused for taking things as he found them. You had had from Gray:

Now the storm begins to lour,  
 (Haste, the loom of Hell prepare,)  
 Iron sleet of arrowy shower  
 Hurtles in the darken'd air;

who then invoked—

Mista, black, terrific maid,

and other lath-and-plaster machines of the sort. From Mason and his like you had nothing else. Sad stuff—but if you choose to depend upon adjectives for inducing a frame of mind, that is what happens to poetry.

It has been truly said that the adjective is the natural enemy of the verb. Of course it is, and of the noun, too:

since for every noun heightened by a qualification you can show a score bled to death. Not a doubt of it but the high Sublime has died of adjectives. Longinus, I know, declared that 'vastness and mystery' are concomitants of sublimity, and his disciples saw no readier way of getting either than by underscoring the facts with which they dealt. But let the reader be pleased to observe what troubles involve Gray in the last two lines of the quatrain just quoted from him: in the first of them a bald tautology, since his qualification of the effect merely forestalls that of the cause; in the second, his anticipation of the result of the hurtling of arrows washes out the value there might have been in that strong verb. For, obviously, if you state that the air is already 'darken'd air', it is not the hurtling which is going to darken it. It was not, however, Longinus who went on from his postulate to infer that, since 'vastness and mystery' are necessary, therefore 'a clear idea is a little idea'. That was Burke, and arrant nonsense it is. What is extraordinary, though, is that, relying as he did on the Book of Job to prove his case, he did not see how precise the images in that great poem are.

'Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee? Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow? . . . Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook? . . . Will he make a covenant with thee?'

Vastness, yes, and mystery; sublimity enough: but what could be clearer? And what adjectives do you find there to qualify your great facts? Not one.

It is hardly worth while to remark that literature has no way of escape from the facts by way of vagueness and mystery. It may try to transcend the facts, but it cannot escape them. You don't escape a thing by jumping over it. Literature

is an art, and depends upon the facts, because Life does. But when you seek rather to induce a frame of mind than clothe the spirit of fact, it is astonishing how little fact you can do with. I remember calling one day, in Florence, upon the learned and gifted lady who chooses in Literature to be known as Vernon Lee. I found her in her drawing-room with a book, half a sheet of note-paper, a pencil, and a frown. The book was a volume of Swinburne, the half-sheet was blank, and my friend greatly irritated. She told me that she had been going through *Hertha*, intending to jot down 'the facts' as she went. But there was nothing to jot. Two things, among others, astonish one in Swinburne : the small proportion of fact to diction, the large proportion of adjective to fact.

Nevertheless, it does not do to generalize about Literature. No doubt there is a high Sublime to be reached. Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth will lift you to it upon ever-widening circles of splendid imagery. Burke's notion that you cannot be supremely moved unless you experience 'delightful horrour' is nonsense. You can be moved by feeling and sharing the poet's power and mastery. And that is what happens to us when, on his broad back, we sweep upwards and spurn the stars with our footsoles. But there is another way of uplifting in which no preparation or building up of imagery is used at all. Supreme emotion may be caused by the use of significant fact alone ; and Longinus, the exponent of the Sublime, was forced to allow it, though it was against the run of his argument. There *is* a sublimity, he says, which will do 'like a flash of lightning' what skill, art, and arrangement may attain in a treatise, or the use of lofty diction persuade you into believing. That kind of sublime resides in fact. 'A bare

idea', he says, 'by itself, without spoken word, sometimes excites our admiration because of the greatness of soul implied'. He gives two examples from Homer, one being the silence of Aias in Hades, when Odysseus went down and saw him there among the dead heroes; and then a third, and a very interesting one, from the Pentateuch. He takes it, he says, 'from the legislator of the Jews, no ordinary man'. In fact, Moses. 'God said—what? Let there be light; and there was light.'

As sublime as you can have—but perfectly unqualified. If he had searched the Scriptures further he would have found examples of that sort of sublimity in every page. To say no more of Job, he could have paralleled the silence of Aias, from the Apocalypse. 'And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour',—than which, considering all things, I don't know a more tremendous statement in the whole range of the Bible.

But Longinus confines himself to epic poetry and rhetoric for his examples both of the high and elevated, and of the other sublime. I wish to go lower in the scale, and to suggest that in lyric poetry also there is a sublimity discernible which depends for its power upon the exact contrary of the high sublimity; one which depends upon fact alone, upon plainness of statement and perfect clearness, and which would be diminished, would imperil, even lose, its sublimity by any vagueness or vastness or elevation or inflation of language. To me the most curious thing about that sort of sublimity is that the lower you go in the pretensions of poetry the more of it you get. It is, indeed, the only kind of sublimity or uplift which you do get. And it follows, and is true, that the closer the poet is to the folk, the

common people, the less he relies upon qualifying adjectives, and the more upon stark fact. It is partly because of this lowly origin (for I cannot doubt but that it originated where we find it most frequently), and partly because of its innocence of apparatus, that I call this kind of power in literature the Little Sublime, and seek to distinguish it from the 'big Bow-wow' or High Sublime.

One needs go no farther afield than 'The Ancient Mariner' to find an example of each kind of sublimity. Here, firstly, is the High Sublime :

O wedding guest ! this soul hath been  
 Alone on a wide, wide sea :  
 So lonely 'twas, that God himself  
 Scarce seemed there to be.

There is a fine image there, as vague as you please, as vague indeed as men's ideas about God are bound to be. It gets its effect by qualification, by adjective. It is not enough for the poet, though it might well have been, that he was alone at sea : he feels bound to tell you more about the sea, and to tell it you twice ; and then he must attempt to tell you how much alone he was. But it is a fine image, all the same. Now, farther on, we have a good example of the Little Sublime :

O happy living things ! no tongue  
 Their Beauty might declare :  
 A spring of love gushed from my heart,  
 And I blessed them unaware.

Mere statement of what happened : *A spring of love gushed from my heart.* You may be moved by both, or by one more than the other ; but I as a human being declare that the things which move me most are the things which men do, not the things which they think. When I read in a

poem, just in that place in it (for that is essential), that 'a spring of love' gushed from the heart I feel that flash of lightning which Longinus was driven to admit of. No adjective, no qualification; any qualification would have weakened it. Just in that place, after long tension, that supreme fact has the effect of sublimity upon me. It lifts, and it moves. I receive 'a sudden glory'.

As I have said, you find such fierce and stabbing simplicity chiefly in the folk-poets. Homer is one of them, whoever Homer was. The Bible is another, however and by whomsoever the narrative parts of it were written and compiled. I need not enlarge here upon the precision of the statements there. Fact is all in all. There is neither heightening nor the need of it. Other poets, not at all of the folk, and for other reasons, have depended upon fact and plain statement; Dante was one, a very learned hand; Chaucer was one, though he was a court poet. But the man of ours whom I have chiefly in my mind at the moment is Sir Thomas Malory; and that for a particular reason. First, however, consider this:

*Lancelot in the Castle of the Sangreal:* 'So came he to the chamber door, and would have entered. And anon a voice said to him, Flee, Lancelot, and enter not, for thou oughtest not to do it. And if thou enter thou shalt forthink it. Then he withdrew him back right heavy. Then looked he up in the midst of the chamber and saw a table of silver and the holy vessel covered with red samite, and many angels about it, whereof one held a candle of wax burning, and the other held a cross and the ornaments of an altar; and before the holy vessel he saw a good man clothed as a priest. And it seemed he was at the sacring of the mass. And it seemed to Lancelot that above the priest's

hands were three men, whereof the two put the youngest by likeness between the priest's hands, and so he lift it up right high and seemed to show it to the people.'

That is naked language, as naked as the Bible, but as vivid and as beautiful. No folk-speech could have been less adorned, more unqualified. The reason for its bareness, and for its use by me in this place, is resident in the very nature of romance. 'Romance looked at life with new eyes and saw everything isolated, startling, strange. The only possible way of rendering that strangeness was to keep the expression as naked as the thing. Any adjective except its literal equivalent would have blurred the image. Folk-poets may have relied upon fact because, to them, it was the most momentous thing in life. The romance writers valued it because of its strangeness—a strangeness in which they saw an essential element of beauty.

But after Malory and the Bible, when Literature found itself and became more art than instinct, the poets mounted their high horses. Literature then shared functions with rhetoric and cookery, sought to persuade, sought to beguile. You had the rodomontade of Marlowe, the sophisticated, italicinated romance of Spenser; you had Shakespeare, who could do everything, and had something of everything, including some of the Little Sublime as well as much of the Big; then Milton, who had practically none; then the Augustans, who developed the false sublime; and then the revival. At the very beginning of that revival—before Burns, before Blake—you find a beautiful example of the Little Sublime in Lady Ann Lindsay's 'Auld Robin Gray'. There are two lines in the first stanza of that masterpiece which are as fine an example as I know of the poetical use

of fact in poetry. And yet in themselves they are nothing at all.

Young Jamie loved me well,  
And sought me for his bride,  
But saving a crown  
He had nothing else beside :  
To make the crown a pound,  
Young Jamie went to sea ;  
*And the crown and the pound*  
*They were both for me.*

*Mentem mortalia tangunt.* Those two last lines always move me. The pathos of the story, the *clou* of the tragedy is in so inconsiderable a thing as that. The whole stanza is amazingly good narrative, but the 'sudden glory' comes at the end. You are let into a cottage interior. A flash of lightning—and you see into the heart.

Lady Ann caught the art of that levin-stroke (for with her it *was* art) from the ballads, which obviously she knew. Where did Wordsworth get it, except under the urge of his daemon? Unfortunately, though he knew how to use it, and none better, he allowed himself also to abuse it. Here is a curious case, where he overdoes it, and endangers a poem; and then saves it by a line— one line of the real thing :

The cock is crowing,  
The stream is flowing,  
The small birds twitter,  
The lake doth glitter,  
The green field sleeps in the sun ;  
The oldest and youngest  
Are at work with the strongest,  
The cattle are grazing,  
Their heads never raising :  
*There are forty feeding like one !*

All that is a catalogue, and, to me, perfectly ineffective, until the last line—the solvent of his brew, which absolutely does the poet's business. Everything drops into its place. Really, it is like a penny in a slot which sets all sorts of machines turning and running about. What was it happened—I forget—whereupon 'the butcher began to kill the ox, the ox began to drink the water, the water began to quench the fire, the fire began to burn the stick, the stick began to beat the dog, the dog began to bite the pig'—and the pig to get over the stile? The last line of Wordsworth's 'Poem by Brother's Water' has that effect upon all the others, to my ear.

One should not, Socrates said, lay hands upon one's father Parmenides, and I don't want to dwell upon what is undoubtedly true, that Wordsworth ran the use of plain statement to death. Fact ill-used is worse than none; fact out of place will kill a poem dead. Rightly placed, one fact will make a poem immortal. My last quotation should have settled that. To Wordsworth, I have no doubt, fact was never out of place. Yet—

I've measured it from side to side,  
'Tis six feet long and three feet wide,

is nothing but annoying to the reader. There are many worse cases than that, but I am not going to consider them now. He is a great poet, and may do what he likes for me.

And Crabbe:

Squire Thomas flattered long a wealthy aunt  
or

Grave Jonas Kindred, Sibyl Kindred's sire,<sup>x</sup>  
Was six feet high, and looked six inches higher.

<sup>x</sup> This seems to desire, as it deserved, *Rejected Addresses*:

John Richard William Alexander Dwyer.

Was footman to Justinian Stubbs, Esquire.

It didn't matter how grave he was, or how high—but Crabbe could never see it.

I said a moment ago that the nearer you went to the people, the more of the Little Sublime you found. I am sure that is very true. Fact is the constant daily concern of the people who are up against it at every turn. They don't appreciate quality; their stock of adjectives is restricted, and highly conventional. I have often thought that to hear a good peasant talk is something like listening to Homer, when it is not almost exactly like hearing the Bible, as in Scotland it still is. Well, Homer is folk-poetry, and so is the Bible. The adjectives in each are either conventional or literal. If Homer calls a wave blue, it *is* blue—and when the Bible says, He went forth a leper as white as snow—there's no mistake whatever about his whiteness. The Ballads are just like that, and I shall close my paper with them.

There are bad ballads as well as good ones; but the bad ballads are never false, and consequently not nearly so bad as bad sublimity—as Collins on the Passions, or Gray on the Bards. Those things commit the sin against the Holy Ghost. Bad ballads, like the Robin Hood set, are merely stupid. The good ballads are among the most beautiful things that we possess. Let any one read the greatest of all, 'The Wife of Usher's Well'.<sup>1</sup> That is, as the lawyers say, my case. I call attention (*a*) to the abundance and significance of plain fact in it; (*b*) to its extraordinary frugality in the use of adjectival qualification; (*c*) to the magic, or romantic, envelopment which is obtained by the use of fact alone. It is not possible to get better narrative than that, or the effect of the supernatural with a reater

<sup>1</sup> Child, p. 168.

parsimony of means. It is all simple, straightforward relation until we come to—

It fell about the Martinmass,  
When nights are lang and mirk,  
The carlin wife's three sons came home,  
And their hats were of the birk.

and then and there we are immediately lifted, by no palpable means, into the supernatural. The touch 'Their hats were of the birk' certifies us. Directly we hear that we know where we are. Why so, we cannot tell. And this clinches it :

It neither grew in syke nor ditch,  
Nor yet in any sheugh ;  
But at the gates of Paradise  
That birk grew fair eneugh.

Literally it is all done with that. Who can explain it ? Not I. But what adjectival heightening could enhance it ? None.

You never know where a fact is going to find you out. It may be in the middle of a poem, as in 'Usher's Well', or at the beginning, as in 'The Unquiet Grave'; and there again I don't know why I am moved by it, as I undoubtedly am. In that ballad a young man is lamenting at his girl's grave; and it begins :

The wind doth blow to-day, my love,  
*And a few small drops of rain :*  
I never had but one true love,  
In cold grave she was lain.

So far as I am concerned, though I can't for the life of me tell how or why, the first two lines turn that ballad for me into the thing of beauty and tenderness which I find it to be; two apparently irrelevant facts about the weather, unrelated to anything which is to follow them. I wish I

knew ; but all I have to suggest is based by analogy upon what I believe to be the truth, that certain chords of organ-music will cause glass windows to ring, and sometimes will shatter them. So I think it may not be too fanciful to suppose that certain facts related in their proper place in a harmony or sequence of facts may have an intimate bearing upon what we are pleased to call the heart-strings. That happens in life : a thing seen, an emotion voiced may break us down. A spring of love may gush in the heart, when that sealed fountain is struck with the right rod. I can suggest no other reason.

If I were to choose two more ballads to bear witness to the uplifting power of bare fact, or to the heartrending power of it, I should choose for the first, 'Thomas Rymer',<sup>1</sup> where the *clou* to the poet's weird experience lies in the statement that—

For forty days and forty nights  
He wade thro' red blude to the knee ;  
And he saw neither sun nor moon,  
But heard the roaring of the sea.—

portents which really make the poem ; and for the second, the touching plea of Fair Annie when Lord Thomas not only proposed to play her false, but invited her to minister to his coming bride.<sup>2</sup> So much she will do for him, she says. Whereupon he—

But she that welcomes my brisk bride  
Maun gang like maiden fair ;  
She maun lace on her robe sae jimp  
And braid her yellow hair.

But at the 'jimp' robe Annie breaks down. The simplicity of her answer pierces the heart.

<sup>1</sup> Child, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 118.

But how can I gang maiden-like,  
When maiden I am nane?  
Have I not born seven sons to thee,  
And am with child again?

So much, then, for the Little Sublime in literature, which may stir you by a lonely word, or by a concrete image. It is a simple truth that if in narrative poetry you wish to realize a spade, the best thing you can do is to call it one, and leave it at that. The revulsion against the 'big Bow-wow' which we are in the midst of just now will be worth the eccentricity, the frivolity, the ugliness and brutality which disfigure much present-day poetry, if it lead us ultimately back to the right use of significant fact. We shall in time rediscover the illuminating and transfiguring power of plain statement.

## *Analogy from the Tailor's*

WHEN Herr Teufelsdröckh's paper bags, containing the materials for *Die Kleider, ihr Werden und Werken*, were consigned to their editor, it does not appear that they included all possible branches of his great subject. There were, in modern phrase, 'avenues' unexplored, one of which would certainly have led the philosopher to the snow-line of Parnassus. For if literature is not the garment of thought, what on earth can it be? Who, in these days at least, will suggest oratory as a tolerable substitute? A cloak of darkness, a domino, chain-mail, motley, anything you please in the way of disguise; but not clothes. If literature, then, be a department of tailoring, consider whether there is not a complete analogy between the way a man wears his clothes and the style in which he dresses out his thought. I commend it to a colleague of mine<sup>1</sup> who has recently anatomized this hardy perennial, I hope to the discharging of his bosom—for the stuff is undoubtedly perilous.

The best-dressed man in London—if there are men left in London who still dress—is he whose old clothes look as if they might be new, and his new as if they were old. (To achieve this distinction it used to be said by dandies, that it was essential to have a man-servant of your own build who would not only hot-press your old clothes, but

<sup>1</sup> J. Middleton Murry, *The Problem of Style*. (Oxford, University Press, 1921.)

wear your new before you did.) The ideal which such an exquisite had always before his eyes was that of one whom you should pass in the street, and remark, and go your way remembering, and yet be entirely unaware how he was dressed, or whether he was dressed or not: an ideal, that is, of completeness and distinction of personality, without any local excrescence; success, in a word, without visible effort. Observe, however, that though the perfectly-dressed man was sensibly, (if you like) palpably clothed, there was nevertheless a something, not himself, not his clothes, but between them, which made him remarkable. He passed you by as himself and nobody else, but also as a memorable man as well as an individual. An emanation, an aura, a presence distinguished him, you knew not how. As some women are known by a perfume, and some men by a white hat or nankeen trousers, so your consummate dandy is known by his totality. So it is with your stylist in literature.

That there has ever been a close connexion between literature and the fashions will not, I think, be disputed. The same mental process, the same emotional stresses underlie each mode of expression. You can date a portrait, you can date a poem, by the manner of its presentation. Is there no Zuccaro apparent in Elizabethan writing? No Vandyke in Caroline? Surely. Do we not read the periwig into Congreve, the Ramillies into Addison; the tie-wig into Gray? But enough of the fashion, with which style has only so much to do that it keeps a bowing acquaintance with it, 'neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance'. A rough survey of some particular school of writing, such as the Elizabethan or Jacobean, would perhaps decide the hasty student off-

hand that style was universal in those spacious days. It was not ; but fashion was, from which all writers started, which few left, which the many—as is their way—overshot in their exuberance. When Florio went to work on Montaigne, North on Plutarch, Fenton on Bandello, Chapman on Homer, each followed the fashion and outwent it. They were remarkable writers, with tricks which could be caught, with a manner which could be copied. But who could copy Shakespeare, who so clothed his thought that, though you could date him by a sequence of six words, you know that their quality rather makes the sixteenth century than is made of it ? There is a sense in which Shakespeare is an Elizabethan ; yet, as there is no other like him, there is a sense in which he is only Shakespeare, ‘not of an age, but of all time’. Don’t choose a crowning passage, like Hamlet’s ‘What a piece of work is man’, which you will only better in Isaiah or Job, but a passage of his journey-work :

‘She did show favour to the youth in your sight only to exasperate you, to awake your dormouse valour, to put fire in your heart, and brimstone in your liver. You should then have accosted her ; and with some excellent jests, fire-new from the mint, you should have banged the youth into dumbness.’

Banged the youth into dumbness ! Where else among the Elizabethans will you find the like of that ? He could, of course, out-Florio Florio when he felt like it. He could be as tiresome as Ben Jonson, as cryptic as Bacon, very nearly as foolish as Coryat. He could mouth like Marlowe and make doggerel like Tusser. Much of that was demanded of him, some of it, I think, amused him in the doing. In those phases of his wit where he was pleased to write no

better than a Christian or an ordinary man I suppose it must be owned that he shared our rueful heritage of being enabled to drop below our best. Even so, he wore his rue with a difference.

How Sir Thomas Browne wore his plain commonwealth habit, and how Milton his ; the one with what a quiet grace, with what a feeling for the distinctive in line and in tone ; the other how encased in the buckram, how tormented by the starch, it were not hard to show. But Milton's prose forbids quotation, because his sentences are interminable. The *Areopagitica* goes on and on, like a goods train lumbering over Shapp ; *Urne-Buriall* sheds its mournful wisdom like rose-leaves on the page—*elegantia quadam prope divinum*. Sir Thomas wears his pedantry lightly. It encumbers Milton at every turn. And then, in full Restoration, Dryden inaugurated a standard of writing which the best after him have always striven after, the standard of extreme plainness and ease of expression, with personal distinctions so subtle as to be unnoticeable except by the *συνετοί*. It is remarkable in Swift and Defoe ; it is in the letters of Walpole and Cowper ; it is lost alike by Gibbon and Johnson ; and in the days of the Regency and the Essayists, with a likeness among them so strong as to make hazardous the work of their biographers and bibliographers, it would have disappeared altogether but for William Cobbett. One can hardly call Cobbett's a quiet style ; yet it is in the Swift tradition. It is plain English, and it is Cobbett too ; not a manner, but a style.

In our days, heirs of the ages as we are, with all that effort and splendour behind us, the very wealth we enjoy make style more hard to come by. How can we help being eclectics ? Yet in whose wardrobe had Kinglake plundered

to dress out *Eöthen*? Of whom was Matthew Arnold the sedulous ape? With great respect to a recent *Literary Supplement* I would urge that Carlyle had manner rather than style, as Emerson, as Meredith. One knows that, surely, because, such as it was, it ended by hiding their thought, born though it had been of a struggle to reveal it. I can recall no cases where *style* has sprawled into manner; but over and over again manner has hardened into mannerism.

And of the ultra-moderns one should say something on this side of discretion. Durst it be hinted that Mr. B—m's literary vesture is the least in life too drawn-in at the waist, the sleeves a thought too tight, the trousers, if anything, with too razor-like an edge? Or that Mr. C—n's is unduly décolleté? Or Mr. B—c's too weighty for daily wear? Or that Mr. S—y's——? But no: I feel sure that the last-named beau must do as he pleases.

## *The Root of Poesy*

IN the ‘Apology’ prefixed to his latest volume<sup>1</sup> Mr. Hardy, certainly the most revered but one of our bards, complains of criticism—of some specifically, and in more general terms of some which in fact is hardly criticism at all, but rather an absence of warmth; not ‘glacial judgements’, but a reception which has been respectful but unenthusiastic. I suppose it would not be possible to set bounds to the tribute which a poet would receive, as his due, from the public. If the recent Convention of Genoa had been held up while Mr. Lloyd George, assisted by interpreters, read aloud *Late Lyrics and Earlier* to the plenipotentiaries and united staff; or if the House of Commons had adjourned for a day to possess themselves (say) of some immortal work of my own, I don’t know that either Mr. Hardy or I would have thought it anything out of the way. As Mr. Mathews’ young man said to me upon a certain occasion, ‘They are like that’. But in soberness, and remembering that, as the tag has it, we can’t all do everything, I don’t know that, with all the will in the world, Mr. Hardy’s could be described as an endearing Muse. Nearly all his poetry is elegiac—*The Dynasts* itself is full of elegy; and elegies, from the time of Gray at least, have been favourites with us. Wistful repining, ‘pastoral melancholy’, are what might be looked for from a nation at once serious and restrained, pious and patient. But the tops of the various quills which Mr. Hardy has touched have not been tender. His melancholy could never be

<sup>1</sup> *Late Lyrics and Earlier*, by Thomas Hardy. Macmillan, 1922.

called a leucocholy. His elegy is frequently ironic, sometimes sardonic. He harps upon disillusion, has a crow to pluck with Fate. He is more concerned with the shock of new loss than recollections of old happiness. He does not, indeed, allow us to feel sure that he has ever been happy, ever able to ignore the *amari aliquid* which may have been lurking for him. He has willingly—I do not at the moment say wilfully—courted the Ghosts with which any sensitive man's world may be thronged. He has dwelt much in the past, not with satisfaction; and has allowed it to overshadow his present. The sun, in fact is behind him, chiefly, as I think, because he has turned it his back. In reading his poetry, strangely difficult, struggling, as it often is, with a reticence which is natural to him and a languor which must be temperamental, one cannot be sure whether he regrets so much as resents that which moves him to utterance. Out of the fullness of the heart the lyre should speak: but of what is Mr. Hardy's heart full? Or is it his heart, anyhow, which instructs his lyre? It is perhaps extraordinary, but I think it is his head, rather. If that be so it is hopeless for him to expect a general or a generous response to his strains. Deep calls unto deep, and heart to heart, and head to head; but seldom, I believe, head to heart. We bend the knee to a mighty intellect, but we neither fall flat on our faces nor seize Mr. Hardy and carry him shoulder high to the Capitol.

His best poems are narrative, truly observed, and truly felt. There's no doubt about the heart there. 'The Trampwoman's Tragedy', 'The Sunday Morning's Tragedy' are piercing ballads, and the former is much more than that—full of wild air, full of landscape, instinct with the ethos of the wanderers of our green roads. In

such poems, and in certain generalized, plangent scenes in *The Dynasts*, Mr. Hardy rises to the height of his power, which is the height of a great English poet. Few have attained such a height, still fewer have kept there long. Mr. Hardy has not; but while he is up he has all our homage. It is when he allows himself to repine, to lament lost opportunity, to contrast what was with what is, apparently to their mutual disadvantage, that, as Dr. Johnson said of equally futile matter, ‘the attention naturally retires’. And when, as it were, for mere wantonness, the poet yields to his curious research into the sometimes shocking confluence of things, the attention does not so much retire as sharply withdraw itself—as when the prospecting snail fetches up against a brick-and-flint wall. Certain incongruities which he collected and called *Satires of Circumstance*, he may rest assured, fairly revolted the reader. Of that kind of naughtiness the reception would be glacial indeed. Incongruity may amuse—as his did not; or it may shock—as his did. You may call the *peripeteia* of the *Oedipus* both incongruous and shocking: but it was not ‘a sell’. The reader was not ‘smoked’. The reader does not like to be ‘smoked’.

Now here, in *Late Lyrics and Earlier*, he is smoking us again, not once but repeatedly. In ‘Two Serenades’ a man sings to his mistress, and (next year!) to a new one (next door!). That is wantonness. In ‘The Collector Cleans his Picture’ a figure emerges under his fingers, as he supposes, of ‘the ranker Venus’. He kisses the fair similitude and goes on rubbing. Finally he discovers a hag, pointing with her finger

towards a bosom  
Eaten away of a rot from the lusts of a lifetime.

A grim morality, treated intellectually rather than emotionally. We should be impressed ; the heart should stand still for a moment—instead, the gorge rises. It is not grounded upon emotion. It is an intellectual fantasy. ‘The Woodfire’ will offend many, and gratuitously. A man is burning on his hearth logs made of the Tree of Calvary, ‘with cuts and stains thereon’. Mr. Hardy must allow me to say that he is too old for such gibes. Let him remember ‘Le Procureur de Judée’. If the thing must be done, that is how to do it. Nevertheless, I think that you shall as well scoff at a man’s mother as at his religion.

‘Sir Nameless’ is a subject for Quarles, an analogue upon Mutability, and perfectly legitimate ; but ‘The Chapel Organist’ is spoiled by being stretched out beyond the limits of the probable into those of the absurd. Many women have sunk, some have deliberately dipped, into prostitution—but not in order to play the organ. Humour would have kept him from that tumble into bathos. ‘The Whipper-in’ is a ‘sell’, after the order of *Satires of Circumstance*. A boy comes home from sea and warms at the sight, as he thinks, of his father, the Whip, in his red coat. It *is* his father’s coat, but used now to scare the crows. His father is dead. ‘A Military Appointment’ is of the same stuff. A girl is waiting for her lover, and another tells her that he will be there, but late. She will wait all night for him, she says. Then the friend tells her that he will be there, but to meet someone else : in fact—

he has grown the lover of me !—

That lover of yours—

And it’s here our meeting is planned to be.’

One cannot cry at that. One smiles—but sourly.

There are others of the sort, and I am sorry for them.

If Mr. Hardy had felt them, he would have written some of them differently, and some he would not have written at all. But we may as well admit—what is indeed sufficiently obvious from his novels—that he can be as perverse as the best of us, and is perfectly incurable. Very well; but then he must not complain of ‘glacial judgements’. You may ‘smoke’ some readers all the time, and all readers some of the time—at least Mr. Hardy can. But neither Thomas Hardy nor William Shakespeare can ‘smoke’ all readers all the time.

## *Edward*

PERHAPS ‘Edward’ is alone in folk-minstrelsy—I cannot recall another example—in bringing high tragedy into the market-place. By that I mean that it handles crime on the great scale, the dreadful ends which passion may work in a strong character. As a whole the ballads are sad, but not terrible, and their psychology is elementary. Life used to be sad, as it still is; and the people have always found more relief in tears than in laughter, more balm. Ballad pathos turns upon intimate, sometimes sinful, sometimes merely hapless matter: the jealousy of sisters, the undue pride of brothers, false sweethearts, untimely death, lawless love, and such like. If sin there be, it is the sin with which we are most acquainted, that which results from instinct working upon frailty. A mother kills her unlawful child, a brother loves his sister, a lover tries his mistress too hard. Or romance comes in, with startling effect, seldom to happy issues. Tamlin is stolen by the ferlies, the carlin wife’s dead sons come home; by their hats ‘of the birk’ you shall know them. Tragic pathos is that of ‘Lord Randal’, where a cruel lady poisons her lover, who creeps home to his mother to die. Or Barbara Allen gibes at her young man on his death-bed; or one sister drowns another; or Lord Thomas compels Fair Annie to minister to his new wife. Pity, these things call for, not terror. But ‘Edward’ is terrible, as terrible as ‘Macbeth’, and in its way as powerful. It is no mere piling of horrors. Nearly everything can be

made out of a dialogue as elliptic as the kommos of a Greek tragedy, almost as terse as its stichomathy. Yet though it is peeled down to the bones, it is all there, and can be made out with attention. I believe that I have followed to their springs all its implications.

Edward is a young man of rank. He has hawks and horses, a turreted hall. He is established in the world, has a wife and children. Not far off his father and mother are living; and he may have been their only child. I think that can be inferred. A certainty is that he was on bad terms with his father, but closely intimate with his mother. Out of that the tragedy grew, for badly as father and son may have stood to each other, father and mother stood worse. Edward's mother hated her husband, justly or unjustly, reasonably or not, on her son's account or on her own, there's no telling now. I am inclined to think that she desired Edward to inherit—there are hints of that, which make the matter worse. She made no secret of her hatred either. Edward knew all about it. Evidently his mother could never leave it alone. That appears from the way the sequel works out. Edward knew, cannot but have known, what she desired; though it is plain too that she never told it him in so many words. She made him aware that her griefs were unendurable; she made her cause seem his, made the worse the better reason; she tarred him on to quarrel with his father. I don't doubt but she arranged the chance meeting on the heath or in the wood.

Now she stands biting her nails at the hall window at the shutting down of the day, and presently hears the hoofs of a horse, a muffled knocking on the grass ride. Edward comes in, stands in the hall door. He does not look at her, says nothing; but she watches him and is drawn towards him

in spite of herself. When she is near enough she sees one thing, and that only. He has a sword in his hand, which is wet. She must speak now. So the dialogue begins.

The position is this: the one rag the woman has left with which to cover her nakedness is that she had never told Edward to do it. He could not say she had told him. She had been much too careful, too provident of the rag which covers her now. Yet now, although she believes he has done it, she must positively know it. Since he will say nothing, she must ask him. Not in so many words, because that would betray her. That would show Edward what *she* knows and he (she thinks) does not—that she had contrived it all; first put the thing in his mind, then laid the grounds of quarrel, and arranged the chance meeting. Nevertheless, if he will not tell her she must get at it somehow! The wet blade insists. It holds her eyes. She cannot now think or speak of anything else. So she begins:

Why does your brand so drip with blood,  
Edward, Edward,  
And why so sad gang ye O?

He answers in a dream, never looking at her:

Oh, I have killed my hawk so good,  
Mother, mother,  
And I had no more than he O.

That won't do for her. She had not expected that he would hold her off like that. Besides, it is too thin a story. So she tells him,

Your hawk's blood was never so red,  
Edward, Edward,  
My dear son, I tell thee O.

I believe that he lends himself to her shifts, scoffs at them, perhaps, in his next evasion :

Oh, I have killed my red-roan steed,  
Mother, mother,  
That erst was fair and free O.

I judge by his choice of animal, Will that be red enough for you ? But she must go through with it, and drag him after :

Your steed was old, and you have mair,  
Edward, Edward,  
Some other dule you dree O.

The thought of that breaks him. He tells her the truth.

Oh, I have killed my father dear,  
Mother, mother,  
Oh, I have killed my father dear,  
Alas, and woe is me O !

There are limits to what one can do even in self-defence. She is not going to pretend to Edward that she is shocked or startled. She knows that she can't carry that off. But she must find out more about his own feelings—everything about them if she can ; and especially how they are towards herself. She makes a wide circuit.

And whatten penance will ye dree for that,  
Edward, Edward ?  
My dear son, now tell me O.

He will ship oversea, he says. The boat is there waiting. But he stands dazed as before ; neither looks at her, nor goes to his boat.

He has done her business, and she is free. She need not care whither he goes, nor how he goes. But there is more to know yet—one thing which she *must* know. She

pursues her roundabout way. He will go oversea? But what of his house and lands? They don't interest Edward. Let the house fall, he says. But his wife and children—nothing for them? Yes, indeed, he will leave them the best thing he has.

The world's room, let them beg through life,  
Mother, mother,  
For them no more will I see O.

Now she is up against it. After all, he is her only child—and it may all have been done for him. So she risks it.

And what will ye leave to your own mother dear,  
Edward, Edward,  
My dear son, now tell me O.

Then, as I think, he looks at her for the first time, and strips her of her rag.

The curse of hell from me shall you bear,  
Mother, mother,  
The curse of hell from me shall you bear,  
Such counsel you gave me O.

That is the most tragic of all the ballads, and perhaps as tragic a story as there is in the world.

## ‘All’s Well that Ends Well’

IT must have been remarked before, though I cannot recall it, how prone Shakespeare was to fairy-tale plots for his comedies, and how liable to upset their delicate logic by the introduction of realism in some part or another. *A Winter’s Tale* is thus endangered by the jealousy of Leontes, treated with dreadful sincerity; Shylock overweights *The Merchant of Venice*; Malvolio is apt to turn *Twelfth Night* into a tragedy; *Measure for Measure* is an outrage to the moral sense; *The Tempest* is threatened by Caliban. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *As You Like It* are successful throughout because they are fantasy throughout. If, in fact, you make a fairy boat for yourself, you may load it with kings and queens of pastoral Garamant and witches of Atlas, but a Count Cenci will capsizes it. *All’s Well that Ends Well*, a comedy not often performed, but about to be so,<sup>1</sup> as I have heard, presents some curious considerations to a close reader. It is an unpleasant version of a charming original. It is undoubtedly Shakespeare, but Shakespeare at his worst. *Troilus and Cressida* is more perverse, but finelier written. It is so well written that one cannot help supposing that it means something more than it appears to mean. Nobody need think that of *All’s Well*.

‘Giletta of Nerbona cures the King of France of a fistula and asks of him in marriage Beltramo of Ros-

<sup>1</sup> It has actually been done since I wrote, at Stratford, with the not surprising result, as I understand, that Parolles and the comic relief became the main business of the comedy.

siglione, who, being married to her against his will, scorns her and goes away to Florence. While he is there, paying court to a young lady, Giletta, impersonating her, consorts with him and wins of him twin sons: whereupon he is inspired with affection for her and takes her to wife.'

That is Boccaccio's summary of the ninth novel of the third day of the Decameron, the source of Shakespeare's play, and a fair statement of a tale which, if not very much like life as it is, or was, is perfectly agreeable to life as it might and could be. Giletta, according to Boccaccio, was not an adventurer in love, but in business—her own and Nature's. She, a nominal countess, intended to be a real countess; she, a nominal wife, intended to be a wife and mother. Beltramo was equally human. He had not been prepared to take a surgeon's daughter to his heart, but having had her there unbeknown, when he saw her the undoubted mother of his sons, he did what gentlemen, and most parties to commercial marriages, do: he felt his heart warmed to her and desired to do her honour. If Shakespeare had followed Boccaccio more closely than he did he might have made a better comedy; but a fair summary of *All's Well that Ends Well* works out like this:

'Helen of Narbonne, having won by a trick the hand of Bertram Count of Roussillon in marriage, with no pretensions to his heart, is repudiated by him after the ceremony. She hears of him presently as in Florence, laying siege to a lady of that city; goes thither herself, and by a second trick wins the ring off his finger and a pledge of his passion for another person: confronting him with which, he is content to take her.'

One difference between the two plots is exposed in this outline of Shakespeare's. Our poet was obliged to insist

upon the ring because he could not wait for the twins, or for even one of them. Another and equally important difference cannot be so brought out. It lies in this, that Shakespeare was driven, it would seem, to bring Diana, the Florentine young lady, into his last act, whereas Boccaccio, having made his use of her, could leave her snug in Florence with Giletta's dowry ducats in her pocket. But why it was that, having his Diana at Roussillon, he should cause her to be flatly repudiated in insulting terms by his Bertram, and cause Bertram consequently to be the only hero of a comedy who was proved a liar and no gentleman in just about two minutes, is not so easy to account for, except by supposing that Shakespeare was in a *Troilus-and-Cressida* mood at the time, and thought that men were uncommonly like monkeys. An alternative, and (to my mind) the right one, is that he was in a What-You-Will mood, for in the last act of this preposterous play one of those lightning conversions from loathing to love which he had tried in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* is made to bring down the curtain. Each of them, perhaps, comes to the same thing: if Shakespeare thought that men were like monkeys, it would follow that he despised his audience. But there is more at stake in it than literary conscience: a theory of human love is at stake; and one of these days a methodical study of Shakespeare's philosophy of love must be undertaken. One knows what Homer's was; one knows what Dante's was. Each was of its time, and fairly stated. But Shakespeare was a dramatic, not a narrative, poet. The realism of the stage made theory stare at you as if it had been covered with whitewash. Every contour of it was thrown up by a hard shadow. It was a thing for admiration, for acceptance or abhorrence. In Shakespeare it was not constant,

but varied from year to year. There is not much doubt what was the matter with it when *All's Well* was put together.

Nor is there any doubt about Boccaccio's theory of love. It belonged to his time and nation, to which Dante's also belonged; and the one did not exclude the other. It did not enter Giletta's head to blame Beltramo for his pursuit of Diana, nor would it have entered it if Beltramo and she had been in normal marital relations. At the same time she did not doubt but that Diana, given a dowry, could be comfortably provided with an alternative lover. When you read all that in its Italian-garden setting, and have it told you in the hard, bright, cogent Italian manner by a man who is sure in his own mind alike of his facts and psychology, it sounds exceedingly reasonable. Observe, for instance, how Boccaccio deals with the turning-point of his intrigue. Giletta in Florence, disguised as a pilgrim, scrapes acquaintance with Diana's mother and lays open her griefs. These being sympathetically received, she goes further. It is necessary, she says, that she have her husband's ring, and also that she bear him a child—

'two things which, so far as I know, no other person can help me to obtain except yourself, if that which I have heard is true, namely that the Count my husband seriously loves your daughter.'

To whom the lady made answer, 'Madonna, whether the Count loves my daughter or not I am unable to tell you; he gives every appearance of it at least. But how can I be of service to you in such a matter, and what do you desire of me?'

'Madonna,' replied the Countess, 'I will tell you; but in the first place I desire to point out what will follow upon your serving me. I see your daughter a

handsome girl of marriageable age, and from what I have understood, and is indeed apparent, the lack of means to make a marriage causes you to keep her at home. I propose, in recompense for the service which you will do me, to bestow upon her immediately out of my resources such a dowry as you may consider suitable for her honourable settlement.' This proposal was pleasing to the lady who, being of high mind, said nevertheless, 'Tell me, Madonna, in what way I can go to work for you, and if it be lawful for me I will willingly do it--after which you may do as it seems fitting.' Then said the Countess, 'It will be necessary that you let it be known to the Count by some trustworthy person of yours that your daughter is ready to do his pleasure so soon as she is sure that he loves her as he has declared. That, however, she will never believe until he send her the ring which he wears on his hand, upon which she has heard that he sets great price. That ring, should he send it, you will give to me. You will then send word to the Count that your daughter will be prepared to do his will; you will cause him to come to your house under cover of the dark; and secretly, in exchange for your daughter, you will put me beside him. It may be that God will give me the grace to conceive, and that then, having his ring on my finger and his son in my arms, by himself begotten, I shall recover him, and dwell with him as wives should with their husbands: of which happiness you will have been the cause.'

Nothing could be more reasonable than that, given the time, place, and persons of the dialogue. Not only is it reasonable, but it is touching. 'It may be that God will give me the grace to conceive....' That was, is, and will be the way of it to those among whom Boccaccio lived, for whom he wrote, of whom he was.

But in *All's Well* we are prepared for another state of

mind. From the opening scene there can be no doubt of Helena's distemper.

There is no living, none,  
If Bertram be away. It were all one  
That I should love a bright particular star,  
And think to wed it, he is so above me :  
In his bright radiance and collateral light  
Must I be comforted, not in his sphere.  
Th' ambition in my love thus plagues itself :  
The hind that would be mated by the lion  
Must die for love. . . .

In that, in her sudden outburst to Parolles, the best speech in the play :

Not my virginity yet.

There shall your master have a thousand loves,  
A mother, and a mistress, and a friend,  
A phoenix, captain, and an enemy,  
A guide, a goddess, and a sovereign,  
A counsellor, a traitress, and a dear :  
His humble ambition, proud humility,  
His jarring concord, and his discord dulcet,  
His faith, his sweet disaster ; with a world  
Of pretty, fond, adoptious christendoms,  
That blinking Cupid gossips . . . ;

and in her confession to the Countess, on her knees :

I know I love in vain, strive against hope ;  
Yet, in this captious and intenible sieve  
I still pour in the waters of my love,  
And lack not to lose still : thus, Indian-like,  
Religious in mine error, I adore  
The sun, that looks upon his worshipper,  
But knows of him no more, . . .

we are to learn that we have a matter of high passion before us, a matter of exalted physical stress, such as Juliet's

was, such as Viola's. If we are to allow, which is hard, that it was high enough to justify the tricked marriage, we must remember that to Shakespeare at a certain stage of his theory high passion was unsophisticated physical desire, and simply leave it there. In Viola there are symptoms that something more transcendent may have been at work, that there was related to the physical a spiritual need. At any rate, Helena is his only heroine who has none of the qualms of maidenhood. Those qualms apart, there is seldom anything else the matter with his maidens than a desire, frankly expressed, to be married as summarily and as completely as possible.

I pass over the business between the afflicted King and Helena with the remark that, in Stevenson's phrase about the resurrection of the Master of Ballantrae, it is 'steep, sir, steep!' in both versions, but that on the whole Boccaccio carries it off the better, because the quicklier. That is where the novelist has a pull. He can skim over his thin ice, while the dramatist must remain in it, and risk wet feet, if not drowning. It is in the Florentine intrigue that Shakespeare varies his original, and for the worse. To begin with, he was in two minds about it. In III, v, it is the mother of the courted Diana who has the idea, or half the idea, of the trick. Hearing of Bertram's lady as 'the wife of a detesting lord', and pitying her, she adds musingly :

This young maid might do her  
A shrewd turn, if she pleased.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is just possible that the widow means a 'turn' for the worse, for 'shrewd' is generally used in the sense of injury; but I cannot imagine that Shakespeare would have thought the fact worse than the intention.

No more is made of it there, and it is forgotten by the poet, who in III, vii, makes Helena propound it to the widow. This scene is both short and crude, forty-eight lines all told. In it, without any preamble, Bertram is made the stuff of brokerage. Three thousand crowns are to obtain his ring and his company. Helena closes with a characteristic tag :

Why then to-night  
Let us assay our plot ; which, if it speed,  
Is wicked meaning in a lawful deed,  
And lawful meaning in a lawful act,  
Where both not sin, and yet a sinful fact.

It is not possible to deny that Boccaccio puts the better face upon what is at best an uncomfortable situation, if only because in his story it was a matter of business and desire of children, whereas in Shakespeare it was a matter of love. But Shakespeare is at no pains to explain how or why Helena could have thought Bertram worth having on such terms. It was necessary that he should have done so because of the exalted note upon which he opened her sorrows. It was not necessary for Boccaccio, who is therefore able to carry it off. He may not convince us that it was a reasonable procedure, but he is successful in persuading us that his two ladies thought it was. He does more. In making Giletta stress the possibilities of what Helena, a true Shakespearian, calls 'the encounter', he makes her a human being, and a touching one. Helena says nothing about the grace of God. All her thought is possession of the ring, possession by Bertram. She gives the impression of being all for the fact; consequently she is not like a human being, or at least she is not like a girl in love.

The end of the play is one of the worst in Shakespeare. It is worse than that of *Twelfth Night*, because it is not condoned by poetry and because none of the characters are sympathetic; it is worse than that of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, because that is a frank absurdity, and nobody cares two straws about anything in it but its being over. Yet in Boccaccio the end is charming, as this will surely prove :

'When it seemed to her that the time was come, she took to the road without being known of anybody, and went to Montpelier, where for a few days she rested, and inquired here and there whereabouts the Count might be. Understanding that he would be in Roussillon at All Saints, and would make great cheer there for ladies and their cavaliers, thither she went in her mere pilgrim garb, as she had been used, and, finding that the company was assembled in the Count's palace and about to go to table, without change of dress, with her two children in her arms, she thrust into the hall, and went about from man to man until she saw the Count. Throwing herself at his feet, weeping, she said, "My lord, I am your unhappy wife, who, to allow you to return to your house, has been long wandering about the world. I require you, in the name of God, to keep the pact between us. See here in my arms, not one son of yours, but two; see here your own ring. Now then is the time come when I should be received by you as your wife, as you have promised". Hearing all this, the Count came to himself and knew the ring, and the children too, so like they were to him. Nevertheless he said, "How can this have come about?"'

Giletta told her story,

'whereupon the Count, seeing that she had told him the truth, seeing also her perseverance and her wit, seeing moreover two such children—to keep the promise he had made her, and to please his company of knights and

their ladies, who all besought him to receive and honour her thereafter as his lawful wife—put away from him his rooted displeasure, caused her to rise up from her knees, embraced and kissed her, and acknowledged her for his lawful wife, and her children for his own.'

And so they went to dinner, and 'lived happily ever after', as in fairy tales they always do, no one doubting it. That I certainly think a pretty and affecting end to a *Griselda* kind of story.

It was altogether too unsophisticated for Shakespeare and his clients of the playhouse; and accordingly in *All's Well* Diana is imported into Roussillon, and man-handled in true Elizabethan fashion. There is much of the usual equivoque about maid and no maid; more than doubts are expressed about her quality:

This woman's an easy glove, my lord; she goes off and on at pleasure.

One knows that there was no preferential treatment for virginity in the days of the Virgin Queen. What is extraordinary is that Bertram flatly denies her; more than that, he asperses her with insult:

She's impudent, my lord,  
And was a common gamester in the camp.

That not only puts Bertram finally out of court, but also makes him ridiculous, since Diana has the means of proving immediately that he had paid a high price for her favour. She produces the ring, silences the hero, chills the audience to the marrow, and finally brings in Helena, who should surely have produced the ring herself as her only overt testimony. Notwithstanding that she has to take the ring from Diana and can only affirm that she is

with child, she is nevertheless instantly accepted. The King recognizes her :

KING. Is't real that I see?

HEL. No, my good lord;

'Tis but the shadow of a wife you see;

The name and not the thing,

whereupon, for no apparent reason at all, Bertram exclaims :

Both, both : O pardon !

and is allowed to ride off on that, and a promise that if she can make him know it clearly, he'll love her dearly, ever, ever dearly. I wonder if that was good enough for a Blackfriars audience, and what Pepys would have thought of it. The turning over of Olivia to Sebastian in *Twelfth Night* is pretty perfunctory, but I don't think there is anything in Shakespeare like the flat repudiation by the hero of the woman whom he thought he had loved, and his immediate promise to love 'ever, ever dearly' the one he had vowed he never would love. 'What You Will', indeed !

Hazlitt, who was the boy for an extreme position, and could never admire a thing heartily unless he thought that all the world condemned it, begins his study of this play by saying that it is 'one of the most pleasing of our author's comedies' ! It is impossible that he can have thought so, and he proves that he did not by what he goes on to say :

'The character of Helen is one of great sweetness and delicacy. She is placed in circumstances of the most critical kind, and has to court her husband both as a virgin and a wife : yet the most scrupulous nicety of female modesty is not once violated. There is not one thought or action that ought to bring a blush into her cheeks, or that for a moment lessens her in our esteem.'

One of the most remarkable bits of special pleading to be found in the works of this remarkable pleader. He concludes by telling us that—

'the poet has dramatized the original novel with great skill and comic spirit, and has preserved all the beauty of character and sentiment without *improving upon* it, which was impossible.'

The italics are his own.

The plain fact is that Shakespeare took his plots where he could get them, stuck into them what his present occasion demanded, and trusted to his vein to pull him through. When he was in a tight place he rhymed elaborately, as he does here, to get out of it, or let loose a shower of verbal quips which made sense out of nonsense or nonsense out of sense, as suited him. He tickled also the groundlings' ears with equivoque; and went as near to the bone as he could, if he did not bite into it. Mostly his luck, if not his genius, saved him. In *Measure for Measure* the seriousness of the matter and the beauty of the verse did his affair. In *The Merchant of Venice* the moonlight of the last act carries off the moonshine of those preceding it, but only in retrospect. At the time of hearing we refuse our credence to the caskets, and none of the sonorous rhetoric can avail. Rhetoric cannot do what poetry can. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest*, and *As You Like It* are all fairy tales with fairy-tale plots, and all saved by pure poetry. But *All's Well* has hardly any poetry, and is not treated as the fairy tale it is. There is rhetoric in it, and Parolles is a good foretaste of Ancient Pistol. But rhetoric lacks the power of the wing, which belongs to poetry alone.

## *Byron at his Worst*<sup>1</sup> .

IT is possible that everything to the credit or discredit of a man of Byron's renown should be known by somebody or other: whether he did or did not sin against nature with Augusta Leigh; whether Lady Caroline Lamb did or did not betray her William; how far he went in the seduction of Lady Frances Webster; what he did or did not to Mrs. Chaworth Musters. That is possible. To the generality of us, who are aware, through what has long been available, how very capable he was of excellence in all or any of those feats, further knowledge of the kind is neither exemplary nor important. There are men alive at this day who spend time and pains in adding one more to the tale of nymphs at Casanova's disposal, or in imputing such and such an extra odalisque to the Parc aux Cerfs: so also there are men who give nights and days to proving that the British are a lost tribe of Israel. To men of that stamp the first volume of these Letters will be a gold-mine. I find it wearisome and ignoble to the last degree. Let us put the case flatly. Byron, introduced abruptly into London society in 1812, lost his head, and became for good and all a posturer, a coxcomb, and worse. In Lady Melbourne, forty years older than himself, he found a silly old woman who allowed him to write to her every day about his disgusting amours, and what is more, answered

<sup>1</sup> *Lord Byron's Correspondence*, edited by John Murray. Murray, 1922.

his letters ; a silly old woman and coarse-grained beyond all credence, seeing that the girl whose heart he used as a looking-glass was the wife of her son ; seeing that the woman on whose honour he proposed to ride off was her niece. Add to all that, that before he had done with Lady Catherine he had begun with Lady Oxford ; before he had done with Lady Oxford he proposed to begin upon her daughter ; before he had begun that he laid himself out elaborately to entrap Lady Frances Webster ; and while he was so engaged he was expecting to marry Miss Milbanke. That is what it comes to : we may as well know where we are. Every look, whisper, sigh, billet, kiss, in these intrigues was communicated to Lady Melbourne, who meantime was doing Pandarus's best to accomplish the Seaham marriage. There is much more that might be said, but little that need be said. To any one who knows what there has been to know about Byron it is obvious that he was a coxcomb ; a young man without judgement, or morals, or truth, or conduct, or manners. There are things in these letters which prove him to have been a cad, others which show him as a blackguard. All that was known before ; but I don't think anything quite so beastly as the tale of Lady Frances Webster's methodical seduction can be found out of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. Still—one knew the kind of thing, and there is no need to labour it.

I would not be misunderstood. I don't set up for a precisian in sexual matters, and am as ready as anybody to allow for the effects of passion in men and women. But in these disgusting affairs, on Byron's side at least, there was no passion at all : nothing but vanity. The chase amused him, the kill flattered his self-esteem. The

writhing of the quarry, however prolonged, roused neither shame nor pity in him. It is quite clear from these new letters that he continued to experiment upon the miserable Caroline long after he had lost all healthier taste for her. She, poor wretch, of whom the truth may best be known in the knowledge of her idiotic mother, lent herself to every turn of the knife, betrayed the most exquisite suffering, and afforded the triumphing male the highest enjoyment he was fit for. Stab by stab, jerk by jerk, all was retailed to the old mother-in-law in Whitehall. Such nauseous fare has not been mine for a long time. If this sort of publicity is a *sequela* of fame, then indeed, ‘how indigent the great’!

The second volume is another matter. Although it exhibits Byron in one of the most discreditable acts of his life, there are new letters from Shelley in it which do him infinite honour, make the book, indeed, his rather than Byron’s. For the first time, too, Mary Shelley’s letter to Mrs. Hoppner in her husband’s vindication is given in full. The accusation of Shelley, brought by a discharged nurse-girl and believed by the Hoppners, was that he had lived with Clare Clairmont, and that she had borne him a child in Naples. Hoppner repeated the story to Byron, who knew the Shelleys intimately and professed to esteem them. Byron replied :

‘The Shiloh (Shelley) story is true, no doubt, though Elise is but a sort of *Queen’s evidence*. You remember how eager she was to return to them, and then she goes away and abuses them. Of the facts, however, there can be little doubt ; it is just like them. You may be sure that I keep your counsel.’

Match me that for disloyalty from any one, even from Elise herself. It is needless to say that he did not keep

Hoppner's counsel, but retailed the story to Shelley. Shelley told Mary, and Mary wrote a nobly vehement letter of indignation to Mrs. Hoppner. It is imperfectly printed in Dowden's book and in Mrs. Marshall's, but here in full. She sent it to Shelley to be forwarded, desiring that it should be shown to Byron. 'I wish also that Lord Byron should see it', she wrote. 'He gave no credit to the tale, but it is as well that he should see how entirely fabulous it is.' According to that, Byron had lied to Shelley, for, as we know, he had thrown them to the wolves in writing to Hoppner. Mary's letter was found among Byron's papers after his death, with the seal broken. The plain inference is that it was never sent on. If it had been it would not have been sent back—obviously. If it had been, it would have been answered. But it was not answered. I cannot think Mr. Edgcumbe makes any case for Byron in this black business. How should he?

Shelley himself, in comparison with the *cabotin* lord, appears as a kind of seraph.

'You are now in Italy,' he writes in 1816; 'you have perhaps forgotten all that my unwelcome anxiety reminds you of. You contemplate objects that elevate, inspire, tranquillize. You communicate the feelings, which arise out of that contemplation, to mankind; perhaps to the men of distant ages. Is there nothing in the hope of being the parent of greatness, and of goodness, which is destined perhaps to expand indefinitely? . . . What would the human race have been if Homer, or Shakespeare, had never written? . . . I do not compare you with these. I do not know how great an intellectual compass you are destined to fill. I only know that your powers are astonishingly great, and that they ought to be exerted to their full extent.'

So he goes on, in a long and serious exhortation. 'It

is not that I should counsel you to aspire to fame. The motive to your labours ought to be more pure and simple....' Then he suggests an Epic of the French Revolution, 'as a theme involving pictures of all that is best qualified to interest and instruct mankind.' Noble and touching words: one loves him the better for his wasted pains. Mr. Saintsbury, the other day, in a deserved tribute to the beauty of Shelley's letters, contrived to claim for him, among other qualities, a sense of humour. Knowing what he did of Byron, and writing so to him! No: Shelley had nearly every good gift. But humour was denied him.

A strange and overwrought letter of 17th January 1817, announces Harriet's death. 'The circumstances which attended this event are of a nature of such awful and appalling horror, that I dare hardly avert [*sic*] to them in thought.' He then explains. 'The sister of whom you have heard me speak may be truly said (though not in law, yet in fact) to have murdered her for the sake of her father's money. Thus did an event which I believed quite indifferent to me, following in the train of a far severer anguish, communicate a shock to me which I know not how I have survived.' I don't at all know what that means. What was the event which he believed indifferent? Harriet's death? If so, the 'far severer anguish' must imply that Harriet, in his belief, had been unfaithful.<sup>1</sup> There is no clear evidence of that, but we know that he believed it. I have seen no evidence at all of the charge against Eliza Westbrook. These are matters of real importance, as anything relating to a man of high passion and extreme sincerity must

<sup>1</sup> On reconsideration, I think that the 'severer anguish' may have been due to the suicide of Fanny Godwin, on the 10th December 1816.

always be. Whatever chips he knocked off the 'Tables of Stone, he is never at any time in the same plane with Byron. Shelley had a moral code and obeyed it, though it was not that of Sinai. Byron may have had one, but did not obey it. That is the difference.

But Shelley shines like a star in this book. Byron had gibed at Keats when he was dead 'for cockneyfying and Suburbing and versifying Tooke's Pantheon and Lemprière's Dictionary'. I don't suppose Shelley had seen the letter which contained those gems of criticism, but he must have seen something of the kind. He gravely expostulates that the 'argument' (that Keats would have died anyhow) 'does not reconcile me to the employment of contemptuous and wounding expressions against a man merely because he has written bad verses; or, as Keats did, some good verses in bad taste. Some plants, which require delicacy in rearing, might bring forth beautiful flowers if ever they should arrive at maturity.' Then, presently, he goes on to praise *Hyperion*. 'The energy and beauty of his powers seem to disperse the narrow and wretched taste in which (most unfortunately for the real beauty which they hide) he had clothed his writings.' By and by he sends Byron *Adonais*.

'Although I feel the truth of what I have alleged about his "Hyperion", and I doubt, if you saw that particular poem, whether you would not agree with me; yet I need not be told that I have been carried too far by the enthusiasm of the moment; by my piety, and my indignation, in panegyric. But if I have erred I console myself by reflecting that it is in defence of the weak—not in conjunction with the powerful. And perhaps I have erred from the narrow view of considering Keats rather as he surpasses *me* in particular, than as he was inferior to others: so subtle is the principle of self!'

Subtle indeed, too subtle for his lordship, I doubt. But said I not well that in such a book as this Shelley appears as a star—

When only one  
Is shining in the sky?

It is proper to say that Byron shows up better as he draws near his end. Nothing, certainly, became him like that. He was generous to Mary Shelley involved in her wreckage. He mortally hurt Hunt's feelings by treating him as an object of charity. Yet he *was* charitable to him. And I can agree with Mr. Murray and his assistants that, when once he had shaken off his Guiccioli and other Italian parasites, a new tone was observable in him. He was, for the first time in his life, genuine, sincere, and in earnest. What would have been the end of his career if he had survived Missolonghi it is as idle to speculate as it would be to consider what he might have been if he had been decently brought up. ‘God made him, therefore let him pass for a man.’

## *An Armenian Knight's Entertainment*

'Let him add a few lines more in regard to the common people of England :—Suppose a foreigner (or, as they would call him, an outlandishman), whether a Turk or a Jew, should come amongst them, and chance to be affronted by any of their dear countrymen in the street ; if he should be spirited enough to return the blow, they would be pleased, crying out, "Well done", and "fair play!" If the foreigner should happen to knock down, which God forbid, the Englishman, and should not keep him under, they would say, "Let him get up again", preserving justice all the while till the end of the battle ; whereas in all other foreign countries which the author has observed in his travels, if such an affray should happen, the Lord have mercy upon the poor wretch who should affront any one of the natives ; the whole multitude would rise to crush him under their feet, as if he were guilty of murder.'

THAT very handsome observation was made in 1788 by a man who had reason to know what he was talking about. He was Joseph Emin, or Ameen, a stray Armenian, who had drifted from Bagdad into India under stress of persecution, and thence into our port of London, which turned out to be a prosperous haven for him. God, who has an eye for the fall of sparrows, kept also within his providence this waif from the Levant, as much of a sparrow himself as any man can well be : bold, assured, tenacious ; cheerful in adversity, giving as good as he got, and after

hardships gallantly borne, dropping into anything he desired, so far as we could give it him—all this is true of Emin, as it is true of most sparrows. Working his way out from Calcutta before the mast, at something like nineteen years old ; landed at Woolwich without a friend or a sixpence ; a porter, a bricklayer's labourer, an errand-boy, a copying-clerk ; starving more often than not, without a shirt to his back, he became the friend and client of celebrated persons, the hero of fashionable ladies, a reputed millionaire (on a hundred a year); hobnobbed with Frederick the Great, was patronized by Catherine of Russia; advised the Prince of Georgia for his good, levied war on the Shah of Persia, and, after all that, married, wrote his memoirs in a gigantic volume, and died in his bed. His book is now edited by his great-great-granddaughter, and published by Luzac and Company. It is nearly as big as the London Directory.

You may call him, not intending any offence to his memory, an amiable parasite. He was undoubtedly both. Not all parasites are noxious, not all prey upon their kind. Emin was not rapacious. He attached himself to mankind because other men had things which he lacked. But he neither levied nor begged. He stated his needs, and they were supplied. He was a friendly as well as a bold creature: very like a sparrow, indeed. Sparrowhood shines in his portrait, which Lord Lyttelton had painted for Hagley. If it had not been for that I would have dubbed him cock-robin, an equally amiable but a showier friend of man. Emin was a little man, and a pleasant-faced but a plain little man. Sparrow all over are his bright inquiring eyes, with their look of ‘Can I venture? Surely I may !’ You see sparrow in his forward, hardy, pliant lips, as prehensile as any beak ; most of all you see

it in the insinuating cock of his friendly little head. Insinuating indeed! nobody came amiss to him, from Sally, ‘the beautiful Sally, lately married to a sailor who had gone to sea’—the first of many good angels of her sex—to Mrs. Montagu, the Queen of the Blues, to whom he subscribed himself her ‘Persian slave’; from Mr. Emir, so called, the Christian bricklayer, who gave him his first permanent job, to the Duke of Cumberland, his ‘royal master’—or one of them. His method with all classes and both sexes was the same. He said exactly what he wanted, and left it to you. But he was a man of courage, a man of his hands. On his voyage out from Calcutta, a runaway of nineteen, he knocked a seaman down who had abused him, ‘with a single slap on the left side of the face’—which, slap or not, according to his own account was a knock-out. Before that, at a still earlier age, he had rescued his grandfather from imprisonment in Ispahan at the hands of a predatory Beg, by going to the palace and asking for an interview with the Shah. Direct action was always the line he took with kings. He interested some court official in his tale, and the interview was actually arranged. Then arrived the Beg and his prisoner, appealing on their knees against further proceedings. The officer then said to Emin, ‘Go, my brave boy, serve your old grandfather and obtain his blessing. I see in your countenance that one day you will become a great man. Then remember what I have told you.’ I think Emin had the makings of a great man, of a kind, though not of the kind which he aimed to be. He was, at any rate, a first-class parasite.

He had the right sparrow eye which knows infallibly where the chances are. After he had been in London for

a year or more, mostly starving, and growing, no doubt, seedier and seedier as he went on, walking one afternoon in St. James's Park, he saw there a Mr. Bodley, a lawyer of the Calcutta Bar whom he knew by sight. Did he accost Mr. Bodley for news of his father? He did not. But Mr. Bodley was accompanied by another person, 'very tall and well made, a stranger to the author'; and after the author had followed the pair up and down the Mall three or four times, it was 'Mr. Bodley's noble-looking companion' that he presently saluted. 'Accosting him, he told him that he knew that person.' The stranger, truly affable, asked him to give the person's name. 'Mr. Bodley,' says Emin. Asked then why, if he knew his name, he had not rather adventured him than another, Emin said, with great address, that Mr. Bodley 'had been so many years in the East, breathing the air of that quarter, he feared some rebuking word from him.' Such a way of putting it at once touched and flattered the stranger. Emin, shabby as he may have been, was presented to Mr. Bodley and invited to walk with him and his friend. He heard news of his father, was pressed for an account of himself, and perceiving that 'the noble stranger' was interested 'thought it proper to open to him the wounds of his heart.' What these were he does not tell us. They may have been the desolations of his countrymen, then as now the victims of Turkish massacre; but if he then had any ambition to become the Liberator of Armenia, he does not say so.

Mr. Bodley presently going home, his 'noble companion' invited Emin to his lodging, which was 'up two pair of stairs, at the sign of the Pope's Head, at a bookseller's shop near the Temple'. The conversation was renewed;

Emin had plenty to tell, was sympathetically heard ; then begged the name of a gentleman who treated him with so much courtesy.

‘ He very politely answered, “Sir, my name is Edmund Burke, at your service ; I am a runaway son from a father, as you are.” He then took half a guinea out of his pocket, presented it to Emin, and said, “Upon my honour this is what I have at present, please to accept it.” Emin thanked him, took three guineas and a half out of his own pocket, and said, “I am worth so much ; it will not be honest to accept of that ; not because it is a small sum ; if it were a thousand pounds I would not. I am not come away from my friends to get money ; but if you will continue your kind notice towards me, that is all I want ; and I shall value it more than a prince’s treasure.”’

That was well said, and perfectly true. Emin wanted many things of his friends and patrons, but money was perhaps the last thing that he wanted. He had it, took it, and spent it—but by no means on himself. Burke, and his kinsman William Burke in India, proved long and good friends. At the moment the statesman was invaluable. He ‘always advised him to put his trust in God’, and gave him writings to copy. ‘The first was an Imitation of the late Lord Bolingbroke’s Letter ; the second, the Treatise of Sublime and Beautiful.’

His next acquaintance came by just such another fortunate chance. Walking up Cheapside, he saw an oriental and accosted him in Turkish. ‘He found him to be an Armenian ; both parties were glad to see each other.’ This man’s name was Asataim ; he was a groom, sent over from Aleppo with an Arab horse for the Duke

of Northumberland. He had himself no English and was at his wits' ends for an interpreter. Emin seemed the very man—and was so. They returned to Northumberland House, where Emin stood interpreter between Asataim and the servants, 'more particularly his Grace's gentleman, Mr. Bale.' His Grace came by these means to hear of Emin, and sent Mr. Bale for him.

'He (Emin) said, "Let me go back to put on a clean shirt and a more decent coat." Mr. Bale said, "My lord will know a man without fine clothes." Emin consented, called God in his heart to his assistance, and entered the library where the duke was standing by the side of the table. After making his bow and paying respects due to his greatness, the duke said to him, "The Armenian groom Asataim does not understand English, nor is he, with his broken lingua franca, able to make us understand him. We are at a loss to explain to him the different marks of horses. Have you seen the chestnut-coloured Arab that he has brought over?" "Yes, my Lord." "Pray, Mr. Emin, what do you think of it? Is it a true one?" "Yes, my lord," said Emin, "if your lordship will give me a commission, I give you my word I can procure a better."

The duke stopped him there with an abrupt, 'Pray, sir, where is your father?'

'In Bengal, my lord.'

'What is your reason for choosing to go to Aleppo?' Emin thereupon told a fib, saying that India didn't agree with him.

It was clever of the Duke to see that Emin was neither going to Aleppo for the sake of the commission on a horse-deal nor for his health. He was not: he tells us himself in a parenthesis that he wished to use that port as a

jumping-off ground for the mountains of Armenia where, owing to the death of Nadir Shah, as he understood, ‘people were stirring pretty briskly’. It is the first hint he gives us of what he was driving at. The Duke dropped the ‘horse-story’, as he called it, and asked Emin point-blank to declare himself.

“‘Pray, Mr. Emin, conceal nothing from me. Tell me the truth, for I see there is some extraordinary thing in your mind. Conceal nothing from me; I will upon my honour stand your friend.’” Emin talked to him till one in the morning of “the various misfortunes of his life, the hardships he had been through, and the adversity which still awaited him in the cause of his country. It affected his lordship so, that he could not refrain from shedding tears. To show the feelings of the human mind, he is now no more, to the great grief of Emin’s bleeding heart.””

I wish I had space for the memorial which, at the Duke’s request, Emin drew up for his consideration. It does him great credit, and carries in its simple but romantic phraseology the conviction of its truth. He said that he came of a family of warriors: ‘As long as I can remember my own family . . . they have always been soldiers, and always did remember Christ. Tho’ they were torn out of their country of Armenia by Shah Abbas and planted in Hamadan, after their captivity they were soldiers still.’ Then, when his father brought him fugitive to Calcutta—‘there I saw the forts of the Europeans and the soldiers exercise . . . and that they were dextrous and perfect in all things, then I grieved with myself, for my religion and my country, that we were in slavery and ignorance like Jews, vagabonds upon Earth.’ He was, we see, an oriental, one of few, impressed with Western methods, order and

discipline. ‘I resolved I wou’d go to Europe to learn Art Military and other Sciences to assist that Art; and I was sure that if I would go into Armenia like an European officer I may be useful at least in some degree to my country; but my father did not listen to me, for God did not give him understanding in these things.’ He relates his escape on the *Walpole* and his subsequent misfortunes; then puts forward his proposals. His father, he said, was well off, and could keep him very easily while he was studying Arms, if he could once be assured that the runaway was serious.

‘If Governor Davis writes that I have a Great Man here my Protector, my father who looks upon me as a person run away and forsaken, will make me an allowance to learn. If I could clear my own eyes and serve my country and my religion that is trodden under foot of Mussulman, I would go thro’ all slavery and danger with a glad heart; but if I must return after four years’ slavery and misery to the same ignorance without doing any good it would break my heart, my Lord, in the end.’

Much more to that effect: but it is a good and touching letter, by whose means the sparrow did indeed find him a nest. For the Duke of Northumberland became so far the ‘Great Man his Protector’, as to win him the patronage of a greater—the Duke of Cumberland; to find him in certain funds, and to stand for that reputed bottomless English purse which served Emin even better than ready money. Introductions, too, he had: dukes and their duchesses, earls and their countesses; Lady Anson, Lady Sophia Egerton, Lord Cathcart, Lord Lyttelton; best of all, the famous Mrs. Montagu, to whom his finest letters are addressed. He adopted her as his Queen, declared himself her

'Persian slave', laid on his *rabat lakhoum* with a trowel, and never hesitated to ask for what he wanted. 'Then if you can make any interest for me to the Duke of Marlborough by Mr. Medows who is my friend and knows his Grace very well, to procure me a commission of Lieutenantcy in the Royal Regiment of Artillery of Woolwich it will be much better for me, for then I can go to the King of Prussia at my own charge by the leave of my general, and I will have no more waiting at Great People's Door from eight in the morning to four or five in the afternoon, at last hardly any admittance.' Very much better for him, no doubt. And he had it. One or other of his new friends procured him, through the Duke of Cumberland, the entry at Woolwich, 'a blue uniform and a guinea a month pocket-money'. Then the Duke went his way to the wars on the Elbe, and forgot Emin. But he did not know his man. Emin scraped up the money and went after him. He edged himself into the levee, was seen and recognized. 'I know you had no money', said the Duke, 'how then did you manage it?' He who gave Emin an opening gave him all that he wanted.

'Emin said, "May it please your Royal Highness, while your humble servant was not known to you, he was in a state of misery; but since he has been honoured by your protection his heart feels an increase in the riches of happiness. Should he in your absence be dashed on the hardest rocks, he is sure milk and honey will flow from them under your auspices. He was assisted; and he hopes he shall never be in want of money, but that his conduct will gain him the good opinion of the world, and maintain the good-will of his magnanimous royal protector, whom Heaven preserve."

That is pretty stiff, as we say ; but Emin calls it a 'short, oriental speech'. It had its effect. A Major Freytag was sent for, and

' no sooner was the officer come in than the glorious Duke took Emin the porter's hand, and putting it into Major Freytag's, said these very words : "I am somehow doubtful of this man's courage. As he is so desirous of seeing service, I charge thee to be very strict, putting him in the front of every action, and bringing me word how he behaves himself." ' Then turning to Emin, he said, " Go with him ; let me hear a good character of thee." ' Here Emin's heart broke the chain of slavery, and jumped for joy, forgetting all his former distresses ; when he, who was but a weak sheep before, became a loose tearing lion.'

We must take his looseness for granted, for beyond assuring us of his patron's approval earned ' by his wild rapidity in a whole campaign, in eighteen different skirmishes, and at the battle of Hastenbeck ', he leaves us in the dark as to why it was he was given twenty ducats at the end of it all, sent back to London, and again forgotten by the Duke. No matter : he had several strings to his bow, and in anticipating some such fatality had written ' To all the Ladies and Patronesses of Joseph Emine ' a letter of candid statement of his further desires and expectations :

' I was in great hopes of serving a Campaign under the King of Prussia after this, but I find I must give over that hope, for it is impossible for me to do it with less than hundred and fifty pounds for year, let me live ever so near ; for which money I shall never trouble your goodness, nor bend any more my neck to the Greatest Prince in the Universe.'

Again, he had it ! I don't know that Mrs. Montagu believed everything he told her. She did not, for instance,

'hope to see him on the Persian throne, or giving laws to the East.' But she believed a great deal. 'I know', she went on 'that he sits on the summit of human virtue.' Wherever he sat, he sat tight. The King of Prussia was his immediate objective; he had to wait a year or more to attain that; but he attained it; and writes very amusingly as well as informingly of the great man, an account which escaped the careful eye of Carlyle. As usual, Emin had worked his oracles to good purpose. The Duke of Northumberland helped him to the Hague; Lady Anson gave him a letter to General Yorke; General Yorke gave him one to a Mr. Mitchell (afterwards Sir Andrew, K.C.B.), who was the British Ambassador at Berlin, and on the point of joining the King. Emin, he, and a courier set out in a wagon.

'One morning early, two hours before sunrise, we met the king on horseback, at the head of his army on a march; who no sooner saw the waggon with two persons in it than he asked Mr. Mitchell in French, who was the second person with the courier. The ambassador said to the author, "His majesty asks who you are?" Emin answered, "I am a man." "What sort of a man?" said he. "What is your name?" "My name", he replied, "is Emin: I am an Armenian." Then the King said, "Is he the man that the Duke of Cumberland patronizes?" Being answered in the affirmative—"Ask him, Mr. Mitchell", said the king, "if he does not know my orders that a volunteer is not to be admitted into my army?" He said to Mr. Mitchell, "Yes; but he hopes his Majesty when he graciously considers how many months [*sic*] by sea and land he was come to spill his blood in his most glorious majesty's service under the hoof of his horse, he would have no objection to the boldness of the liberty taken." His Majesty said, "Ma foi, [c'est un brave

garçon, je souhaite qu'il y fût dix mille hommes de la même disposition que lui.”,

Emin's equipage particularly pleased the King. It weighed eight pounds, and consisted of half a dozen shirts and a pair of boots. He was bidden to mount the Ambassador's led horse, and if we are to believe him, rode *tête à tête* with the lion of Europe for some nine hours, and so on for three days or more. It was as hopeful as it could be. Frederick took to him, and believed in him, relaxed his rule; ordered him an allowance of a ducat a day, three horses, a servant, kitchen furniture. And then—it was hard—Mr. Mitchell, the English ambassador, having reported all that, added to it on his own account, that Emin was to leave immediately he had dined, return to the army of Prince Ferdinand in Hanover, and stay there. Emin was cut to the heart, but obeyed. His description of Frederick is so good that I must afford it here:

“I will do my endeavour to describe the King of Prussia’s person and his way of living. He is no taller than Emin the Persian, he has a short neck, he has one of the finest made heads ever I saw in my life, with a noble forehead; he wears a false wigg, he has very handsome nose. His eyes are grey, sharp and lively, ready to pearce one through and through. He likes a man that looks him in the face when he is talking to him. He is well made everywhere, with a bend back, not stooped at all, like many Europeans. His voice is the sweetest and clearest I ever heard. He takes a great quantity of Spanish snuff, from his nose down to the buckles of his shoes or boots is all painted with that confounded stuff. His hands are as red as paint, as if he was a painter, grizy [*sic*] all over. . . . All the satisfaction that I have, which is great enough, that I have seen Caesar alive, nay

twenty times greater, he is more like King Solomon, for he rules his nation by wisdom and understanding....'

That was in a letter to his 'Magnanimous Queen of the East, Glory of the World', Mrs. Montagu, to whom, after a fruitless campaign in Westphalia, he presently returned, ready now for his main adventure, and more assistance. Once more, he collected funds from his friends—the Duke of Northumberland £100 a year for three years, Mrs. Montagu twenty guineas, Lord Lyttelton ten guineas—and with some of that in hand, and the rest on paper, he wrote a letter 'To the most splendid, most Christian King Heraclius of Georgia and Armenia', announcing himself as ready and able to enter into his service, and to carry with him 'men skilful in all things (if you give me encouragement) to strengthen and polish your kingdom, like the kingdoms of Europe.' That was a liberal offer, of which, however, King Heraclius, probably thinking that the less his kingdom was polished the more likely it was to put up with himself, took no notice whatever.

It took more than mere inattention to quench Emin. He went out to Armenia, via Italy and Alexandretta, reached Erzeroum, and wrote again to Heraclius, whom he now discovered to be, not King, but Prince of Georgia, with a father, the titular king, alive and in Russia. He addressed it therefore 'To his high Mightiness Prince Heraclius of Georgia, whom God preserve', and called attention to the dangers which he had successfully encountered, in spite of the great discouragement his Highness's silence had caused him. He then reported, with, I must certainly think, a want of tact,

'part of an instruction from my father in Bengal....  
He says that upon condition you will be graciously pleased

to confer upon me the most singular honour of thinking me worthy to be made, by the order of the Church of God, your Highness's son-in-law, and will grant a certificate, signed and sealed by your Highness, and attested by two bishops or priests, he orders me to repair to your court ; but if you consent not to this condition, he, my father Hoosep, has charged me not to venture entering your territories.'

I doubt whether, out of a fairy-tale, a young man with £100 a year for three years (which was the Duke of Northumberland's benefaction) has ever sent such a letter to a reigning prince before—for Heraclius was, in fact, reigning though his father Tahmurus was alive. The Archbishop of Tiflis, however, promised to deliver it, and may have done so. If he did, it is not wonderful that Emin had no better luck with it than with its forerunner ; but that did not prevent him from enjoying himself greatly.

'Emin came hither—(Aleppo)—set out in the depth of winter, went to Armenia, and came back again like a comet, but did no damage in the world ; for finding the Armenians equally few in numbers and reduced thoroughly to slavery, he resolved to go among the Turcoman clans, wild mountaineers about Antioch and Scanderoon, and harangue them into a design to take possession of this city of Aleppo, and then proceed upon farther exploits.'

Such is the account of a Dr. Patrick Russell to the Turkey Merchants' Company. 'With immense difficulty and many expostulations', he was dissuaded, and sent back to England. 'If he had not hearkened to us, the consequence of his enterprize would unavoidably have been fatal to all the Christian subjects in the Ottoman Empire.' Not a doubt of it, of course. It was very well for Mrs.

Montagu and the Duke of Northumberland to exalt a comic-opera hero; but Dr. Russell knew what he was doing. Emin was a case for Alexandre Dumas, but not for Christian traders in Turkey, just then.

He was back in England in 1761, and 'stayed in London about eight months, very busy all the time to find ways and means for going to Petersburg.' Needless to say he found both. Lord Bath gave him a letter to our ambassador, Mr. Jonas Hanway procured him a passport from Prince Galitzin; the Duke's benefaction was continued. He wrote his adieux in a hurry to 'the Queen of the Universe', begged her to write to her 'distracted slave', and off he went. In Petersburg he contrived to see and to interest Tahmurus, father of Heraclius, and so-called King of Georgia, in so far as a needy and faded exile living on Russian charity could be interested in anything but money. The legend which accompanied Emin, that he was backed by the Duke of Northumberland with a cool million, no doubt assisted. But Tahmurus, who had broken with his son and heir, not only could not help towards an introduction, but also very promptly died. At the same time died the Empress Elizabeth; so Emin, as he says, 'was left again fatherless and motherless'—which is not very kind to Mrs. Montagu and the Duke.

But a man like Emin took fathers and mothers in his stride, and found a new father in Count Worontzoff, and the inklings of a mother in the Duchess of Holstein, who was to become Catherine the Great. With a letter from Worontzoff to the coy Heraclius he set off in midwinter again for Moscow and Astrakhan; and there at last he found his man, to make or mar his foolish fates, as might be.

He was to mar them. Greek had met Greek this time.

Heraclius was a jaded and cunning Oriental, with no illusions left about his country or himself, too tired to have any at command for anybody else. Nevertheless, a million is a million (the legend had preceded Emin), and he was all smiles until he ascertained—from Emin himself, who concealed nothing—that the hero was unprovided with anything more substantial than unlimitless brass, the heart of a lion, and £100 a year. That learned, Heraclius saw but one thing to do—by all means or any means to get rid of Emin. It was nothing like so easy as it sounded. Emin sat tight, plotted with Armenians on all hands, embroiled himself with the Persians, and made things most uncomfortable for Heraclius. Imprisonment did little; Emin went under for a time; but ladies—‘Armenian angels’ and what not—generally rescued him; and he bobbed up somewhere at the head of 1200 Turcomans. I don’t suppose any man in Europe before or since his time made £100 a year go as far as Emin did. However, there is an end to all things, and Heraclius did at last shake off his succubus. Emin wandered leisurely back to Bengal, picking up a wife and begetting a son or sons upon the way. There, finally, he sat down to write the Memoirs from which my extracts are taken. How true they may be I have no means of knowing, but if they are as true as they are voluminous, they must be Gospel. I have seldom handled a more immense book of Memoirs. You could lay them for a foundation-stone, or begin to build a bridge with them. But vastly entertaining. Very little happened; Emin did nothing but amuse himself at other people’s expense—but that he should have done any of it and survived it is exceedingly much.

Another sparrow from the East, Mlle. Aïssé of Circassia,

was similarly cared for by a French providence a few years before we took charge of our Emin. But she, you may say, fell upon her feet, when in the open market of Stamboul M. d'Argental bought her, a child of four years old. Emin, on the other hand, had to scramble to his as best he could, and did not find them till he had sounded many deeps of distress. She was beautiful and unhappy ; Emin was as happy as a king, much happier indeed than Kings Tahmurus and Heraclius. Mademoiselle wrote charming letters, and so did Emin. One of his is addressed 'To the Wisdom of Europe, Sister to the great King of Prussia, excellent Mrs. Montagu'. Mlle. Aïssé did not beat that, I believe.

## *The Limits of the Readable*

I DREAMED that I was awaiting some great man or other in a long, well-appointed room. It was all very comfortable and rich : Turkey carpet, deep chairs, sea-coal fire, knee-table, silver ink-pot, flowers, and so on. The whole of one wall was book-case breast-high, and the books were mostly folios in 'crimson morocco extra', as they say. I think that I took the titles for granted, but one of them, I know, was Dobrizhoffer's *Account of the Abipones*, a work which I have never read, and never shall, but always had in abhorrence because poor Sara Coleridge was made to translate it, that Hartley might be sent to college. Presently, however, I took down a volume which was as big and looked as hefty as Liddell and Scott ; and it came away quite light, as if it was hollow—which it was. Really it was a box to hold papers, and had nothing inside it but a wire clip. The moral shock of that 'sell' awoke me, as often happens in dreams.

From that point I lay awake, thinking about Lamb's *biblia à-biblia*, and ticking off in my idle mind the things which are readable at odd moments and those which are unreadable—whence came some curious reflections. Theoretically, a fine thing is always readable ; actually, the call which is made upon the reader of a great work makes it much otherwise. I am not thinking of *The Faerie Queene*. That is a serious adventure which comes to a man but once in his life—and that early. (It came to me at nine years old !) You can't thereafter 'pick' in that. But it

is an odd thing that if I were waiting for somebody in a library I could take down Dante or Homer, open anywhere and be occupied ; whereas I would rather sit twiddling my thumbs than read in *Paradise Lost*. You seem to need 'the consecration and the poet's dream' for the one, and not for the others. Why is that ? I think it is because Dante and Homer have more to say than Milton, and are consequently less occupied than he with the manner of saying it. Shakespeare, too, requires an inspiration in his reader. He will not induce a mood, but must himself be induced by one. I remember John Addington Symonds telling me that he had travelled from London to Florence reading Guicciardini all the way : a marvellous feat of detachment, considering the growing attractiveness of the journey and the increasing gravity of the book. I had a Guicciardini (never read) in a thick, dumpy folio, black letter and close printing. Talk of 'massy divinity' ! Not Cornelius à Lapide nor Bellarmine nor the Seraphic Doctor himself were so massy as that. Each chapter was a solid paragraph, a block of type without one break .... A man who could read that on a journey to Italy could read Milton on the top of a motor- 'bus.

I could pick up *The Lives of the Poets*, and browse happily upon it ; but then I could read the Life of the grocer's boy, if it were to be printed. Anybody's life is interesting, or anybody's letters. But I was once in a house in the Midlands whose smoking-room contained nothing but the Parish Magazine and a lot of old 'Quarterlies'. I read the Parish Magazine.

Outdated history is mainly unreadable—Robertson and Hume, for instance. Motley and Prescott survive, because, so far as I am concerned, they are not outdated. Macaulay

is good reading still, so Carlyle, so Michelet, though you need not believe a word they say. But you don't read them for the facts, rather for the impression which facts make upon them. I could always read Gibbon with pleasure until a friend bade me notice how nearly every sentence in him ended with a possessive case. It is horribly true, and has killed my pleasure in Gibbon. I only look at him now to find out how true it is. And that isn't reading at all, but a dreary game, like Patience. Yet what plunis have been pulled out of Gibbon! FitzGerald pulled out the best of all—so good that I can't resist it here and now. It is in a letter to W. F. Pollock :

'His manners were less pure, but his character was equally amiable with that of his father. Twenty-two acknowledged Concubines, and a library of 62,000 volumes attested the variety of his inclinations: and from the productions which he left behind him it appears that the former as well as the latter were designed for use rather than ostentation.'

'Let Empires decline to such a tune', says FitzGerald.

Some people have a book by the bed, but I never do. If I can't sleep in a bed I get out of it, holding that it is certainly for use rather than ostentation. If I ever did have a book there it would be of Essays—but not Hazlitt's, Hazlitt is for youth, which can stand his ill-temper, perhaps be stimulated by it. I don't want stimulus there. I would have Lamb or a volume of the *Tatler*. Or Bagehot. Bagehot for the elderly. You can pick him up where you will and find him good-humoured. He wears common-sense like a new coat, so glossy and personable it is. And then Montaigne, a perfect lucky-bag. He is difficult, but well worth while. If I wished to try the *sortes*, not of

Fate but of Conduct, Montaigne would be my oracle. Here is a reflection which should have been found by unhappy Habsburg or Hohenzollern in 1914: ‘C'est le desjeuner d'un petit ver, que le cœur et la vie d'un grand et triomphant Empereur’. God knows what the digestion of that might not have saved us!

The dream-library was all of folios, and so should mine be if I could afford space for them. But I would have no crimson morocco extra. So far as was decent they should be in their habit as they were born. Who knows what that was, though? I came across a most distinguished book a few years ago, which was in vile raiment, so vile that I can hardly imagine any one guilty of it but the original ‘begetter’. The tale is worth telling for the bang I was able to make of my discovery. I was in the North, on a Government inquiry, the guest of a fine house which, beginning as a peel-tower in Edward II’s time, gradually grew with the fortunes of its owners until it became the kind of mansion it now is. The same family had always had it, and two at least of them were known to have been bookish persons. My hostess, having promised me an inspection of the library, took me into the ante-room of it and left me there while she went for the keys. There were books there, the overflow of the shelves beyond, and many odds and ends with them—cartridges, garden-gloves and baskets, directories, Bradshaws, and things of the kind. I took down at random a tall old book, bare-backed, but with faded green sides, opened it, then looked quickly for the title-page and portrait. All were there. When my hostess returned I threw my bomb. ‘If I may suggest it,’ I said, ‘I should have this repaired and find a place for it on the shelves. It would easily make the reputation of

a library by itself.' She looked politely interested. 'Really? What have you found?' 'A book which I believe to be worth some three thousand pounds.' Then her interest ceased to be merely polite. 'Good heavens!' she said, 'what can that be?' I replied, 'A first-folio Shakespeare.' That bomb was not a 'dud'. I had no time to examine the contents of the library, but must make it some day. The man who had bought that Shakespeare had bought other things. No one knows what may not be there—at present. Some day I shall find out.

## *Daily Bread*

IN my country man goeth forth to his labour until the evening, and goeth forth, too, as often as not at an hour which, to know it, would urge the townsman to dive more deeply into his bed. My man will be putting on his boots at five, if he is a carter, at four, if a cowman. Perhaps, in the pitchy darkness of midwinter, it is no odds what time you turn out if it must anyhow be before eight. But the point is rather that, putting on your boots at four o'clock in the morning, you won't take them off again till somewhere about six o'clock at night. You need good boots to stand that for months on end—and good feet; and it may well be that you have neither. Everything is against them: the squelching mud of half the year, the flints of springtime laid bare by the winter rains, the chalky dust and slippery bents of summer. Corns! and you may have to slide and lurch over the furrows for days together, and you so lame you cannot cross the floor without hobbling. But of all country work known to me (but known, I confess, from hearsay only) I think the very limit for a man with bad feet must be the warping of water-meadows on frosty mornings. Frost-bite has come of that; chilblains must needs come of it. Yet it must be gone through with in the bitter dark, and nobody down here thinks it at all out of the way.

Well, you will be out of doors at latest by six; and before that, if you are a true man, you will have lit the kitchen fire and made your wife a cup of tea—though, if

she is a true woman, she may forestall you. And all these things, and a hundred more of such, you will do every day of the week by the year together for perhaps thirty shillings a week, with wife and children to be fed and found and taught the virtues out of it ; and no man will hear you complain, or would understand you if he did. I know such a man now, a cowman, who cannot count upon one day's rest in the week, and has not had one for some six years. Not one clear day off, not one night out of his own house. The hours, for a cowman, depend upon the milk trains. My man's milk train in particular calls him up at 4 a.m.

All that, taking the *suave mari magno* line of reflection, will be read with pleasure by the townsman, who gets down to his work, by train or tram, dry-shod and under electric light, with paper to read and pipe to smoke. What may induce scorn rather than satisfaction in him will be to learn that the cowman is happy and contented in his lot, and asks no better employment. It is not considered so often as it should be by the combative workman of the town, how that may be. Yet among the farm-labourers of the better sort, men, I mean, of settled life and habit, of stake in a country which withholds them ground of their own in which to plant it, in spite of pay which is the lowest of any skilled labourer's, of insanitary, uncomfortable, and often scandalously inadequate lodging ; of ceaseless, irremediable toil ; of an absence of outlook which might well break a young man's heart—the fact is undoubtedly that it breaks none here ; the fact remains that our men are contented, like their work, and love their moss-grown hovels under the reeking thatch, just as some heroine of Mr. Archibald Marshall's loves her many-windowed hall,

the gallantry of its gardens, its ancestral elms, and the broad spaces of the park.

How is all that to be explained to the townsman? In this manner, and not otherwise, that farm-labour is a Way of Life as well as a livelihood, and that no man settled in a way of life which suits him will complain if the amenity is reckoned as part of the hire. That also is how the artist, or the poet, looks at the pence-halfpence he wins for his happy toil. He's cultivating his garden, as Candide found it wise to do; and if the price he command for his vegetables is scanty, he knows that he is all the growing of them to the good.

That talk of gardens reminds me of another thing which the farm-labourer may or may not have found out. I, myself, think that he has, for he is, like all men who don't get their learning out of other men's books, of an observant and absorbent habit. Few things of the kind escape him; but as for me, I have only recently found out that the less you have of a thing the more you value it, and the more pleasure you have out of it. Obviously, that is true of such things as coal and light, of bread and butter: I find it equally so of luxuries and amenities like art and horticulture. I believe that the pleasure is in an inverse ratio. You have, say, a quarter-mile of clipped yew hedge; or topiary work in battalions of monsters, as at Levens; or, as I saw it once in Salop, a chess-board of it set out on black-and-white flagstones: box on one side, yew on the other, and a canal of clear water in between, as a Rubicon between the hosts. It will take three or four gardeners three or four weeks to clip at Midsummer, and as much in October again; and you

accept it, if you are Mr. Marshall's heroine, as of the order of things—in the large, as you accept a fine morning, or your chief seat at feasts. It does not add specifically to your store of pleasures. But the cottager will have a peacock by his front-door, or a duck on her nest, clip it in odd moments of his day, and take inordinate pride in it, a pride perennial, a pleasure never stale to the eye. There is a man in my village who has two clipped yews of mystical significance and unknown<sup>n</sup> eld. Popularly they are known as the Open and the Shut Umbrella, though Mr. Havelock Ellis would read in them another symbolism, and probably be right. The clipping of such portents is a serious, and in the case of the columnar one a perilous, affair. Yet I have never seen a twig out of place. These things, rightly done, bring their own reward. Men toil after them, ‘as some men toil after virtue’.

It is difficult, likely impossible, to determine how far the born countryman is susceptible to the beauty of his surroundings—to the cloud-shadows on the hills, the ripple in the red wheat, the sun-gleam on coppice and hedgerow, to the spring’s flush of green, or the autumn’s fleeting gold ; yet I know that he does note them, have seen his eye gleam as he noted them ; and I know too that it is not possible for one so weather-wise and weather-wary not to value that which he reads so profoundly and studies day by day with ever fresh application. Townspeople are too apt to argue from expression ; but expression is just what the countryman lacks. A thing is felt, pondered, stored up : the thought lies too deep for tears, or laughter either ; and certainly is not stuff for minor poetry. ‘ You injoy talking about it : I injoy letting it soak in’ : as the gypsy-woman said to the tourist about the sunset.

## *The Anthology in English*<sup>1</sup>

MANY are called to translate the Greek Anthology, as tempting and baffling a task as the Odes of Horace or Songs of Heine; but few are chosen. I choose for Dr. Leaf who, out of some seven hundred of the Epigrams which he has turned, now publishes a substantial selection. I choose for him because he has been faithful to certain fundamental qualities of his originals which distinguish them from all the other Greek poetry that we have, qualities without which a translation would be nothing, as most translations of them in English verse precisely are. Mr. Mackail's prose version is a beautiful thing, perhaps the least in life too 'precious'. No doubt the Epigrammatists did pick their phrases: they never had the air of it. Most of our verse renderings are stiff, many are pompous—both damning faults; all of them, so far as I know them all, are in full dress. But Dr. Leaf's is limpid, lively, easy, pointed, and it keeps to the homeliness of the Greek. That is the supreme excellence of the Epigrams, that they serve domestic uses, and are at once exquisitely suitable, and themselves exquisite. They arrest in imperishable form most perishable emotion—and there it is for ever, like frozen breath. Human grief is a fleeting thing, human love and human piety have the defects of their origin. As often as not they are foolish, ill-directed and ill-continued; but they are always touching

<sup>1</sup> *Little Poems from the Greek*, by Walter Leaf. Grant Richards, 1922.

when they are truly felt. In the Anthology we have human nature at its most touching and most ephemeral, ensphered in perfect beauty. An epitaph for a tame partridge, or a pet dog; for a girl dying on her wedding night; for a child still-born. Here, in four lines or less, are the tears for these hapless ones in a crystal phial. Or a young man loves a dancing girl, or a poet some pretty creature of an hour. The fragrance of his tributary garland is arrested for ever in an elegiac couplet. A fisherman begs the benevolence of Priapus, a mother-expectant vows to Lucina, a shepherd to Pan. The very simplicity of the prayers they breathed can be read here: it is as if they had been poets themselves. Here is a thing which might be matched in an English churchyard:

What joy is there of motherhood,  
What profit in the womb?  
Better not bear a child than weep  
A child's untimely doom.

His mother, I, within this grave  
My boy Bianor laid,  
The grave that fitlier the son  
Had for his mother made.

And here is a sailor's epitaph:

Full many a league of sea I sailed,  
Yet perished here by flame,  
In harbour, where the native pines  
Were felled to build my frame.

And so the waves that bore me hence  
Returned me safe again,  
To find the land that gave me birth  
More cruel than the main.

The bite in those things is not cynical, though it might

have been. Just such a thought would be sighed forth by the peasant as is recorded here with point. I read no sting in the wit, nor rebellion against the fact. The irony in life is recognized—but compare Mr. Hardy's treatment of it!

It is proper to dwell upon the homeliness of the Anthology, for that is its peculiar possession. Even when its poets turned to heroic matter and recorded the dead of Plataea, or the Spartans at Thermopylae, you have nothing of the Pindaric sublime, nothing at all of the lapidary's tragic apparatus. This is Simonides upon Leonidas' men :

Go, stranger, tell the Spartans that we rest  
Hereunder, still obeying their behest—

where the turn is blunt and almost terrible in trenchancy. Then this is how he inscribes the lion over the hero's own tomb :

Of beasts am I, of men was he most brave  
Whose bones I guard, bestriding this his grave.

The sharp twist in the argument there is like the tang of wood-smoke in a cottage parlour; homely wit keeping rhetoric at a distance.

To quit the sepulchre for the bower is to find the Epigrammatists at their second best—or even third best, for next to their piety to the dead come I think their inscriptions to the Gods. In their amatory epigrams they are graceful, playful, perfectly at ease, but not very much in love. They remind me of the post-Elizabethans, to whom love was rather the food of music—Campion and Herrick, Waller and Lovelace. Dr. Leaf detects a real passion in Meleager which I do not. Rather, I think my

learned friend has imputed passion to him, as in this somewhat too eloquent flight :

To our Lady of Suasion pour,  
Heliodore !  
To Cypris the Queen once more—  
Heliodore !  
To the Goddess of Gracious Word  
Pour me a third—  
Heliodore !

Surely that is too eloquent. Meleager, in a couplet, keeps his head. Wit, felicity, hyperbole, all three are there. But here is an ecstasy. *Mηδὲν ἄγαν* is a sound rule which I don't think Dr. Leaf has overlooked anywhere else.

I suppose it must have been noticed before, though I cannot remember having met with the remark, what a close affinity there is between the Greek epigrams and the little earthenware figures first found at Tanagra in Boeotia. Both arts are humble, both diminutive, both serve the dead ; each in its own way is perfect in finish and adaptability to its office. Neither wins the heights or sounds the deeps of emotion. Both are the moments' monuments of a quick-witted, quick-hearted people. The anthologists record the home-emotions ; so do the image-makers. You have girls playing knucklebones or riding pick-a-back, boys at leap-frog or carrying geese to market, matrons reclining, or folded in their reedy cloaks ; fluttering dancing-girls, flute-players, and what not. It seems that they were toys, these charming things, made of a clay so friable as to break at a careless touch. Their perfection of art is exactly comparable to what you find in the epigrams, made like them to serve a moment's feeling. Nature works like

that, making flowers by the thousand million in every pasture—things more lovely than love itself, to be the cud of cows or squelched in the mud by their horny hooves.

Dr. Leaf puts stress in his preface on the greater conciseness of English over Greek, a conciseness I think more apparent than real. We are more monosyllabic than the Greeks were, but our words don't mean so much as theirs could; and the fact has to be faced that no such collection of little poems as the Greek Anthology could be made from our literature. Sonnets galore—but we run to length, and seldom achieve terseness but at the cost of beauty. Consequently the epigram, with us, has confined itself to wit:

Ward has no heart they say, but I deny it :  
He has a heart, and gets his speeches by it ;

or the Anonymous on Bishop Coplestone, who wrote Ward's Life :

Than the first martyr Stephen's fate  
A harder must be owned.  
That poor young man was stoned to death,  
But Ward's been Coplestoned.

Such things, however, we derive from the Latin.

Landor wrote one perfect epigram in English, exactly in the Greek manner—‘Rose Aylmer’; his epitaph on himself—‘Nature I served’—is not in the vein. It is too insolent, and lacks pity. Landor could wag his forefinger at Fate. Simonides never did. So the famous ‘Underneath this sable hearse’ is more Latin than Greek in its magniloquence, while Carew’s lines on Lady Mary Villiers are the real thing, and Herrick’s ‘Here she lies a pretty bud’ as nearly so as Herrick could ever be. He

repeated, but did not better that for another child. Here is the best of all, after ‘Rose Aylmer’:

May! be thou never braced with birds that sing,  
Nor Flora’s pride!  
In thee all flowers and roses spring,  
Mine only died.

I have just tried Cowper, whose epitaph on one of his hares, and another on Lady Throckmorton’s bullfinch promised well. But they are wordy to excess. I must conclude them with one on a little dog, which is in the Greek vein :

Scorn not this grave, nor pinch of dust  
It covers, nor the tears she shed,  
Who buried here both love and trust—  
Things to make fragrant any dead.

## *Noses in the Air*<sup>1</sup>

M R. STRACHEY, a vigorous reviewer in the Macaulay-*Edinburgh Review* tradition, has so far shown himself such a censorious critic that one has despaired of his comfort. It has been therefore a relief to discover that there are at least two persons in History whose works and days he can unreservedly admire. It does seem from his essays collected in *Books and Characters* that he has been able to hit it off with Sir Thomas Browne and Racine, though even there some harsh fate—like the Scythian Artemis at Aulis which compelled the Argives to sacrifice a virgin before the fleet could sail—has made it necessary for him to rend two of his contemporaries before he can really enjoy himself. So he burns incense before Sir Thomas standing upon the prostrate form of Mr. Gosse, and wades to the altar of Racine through the *ἐναρπα βροτόεντα* of Mr. John Bailey. Mr. Gosse can take care of himself, and of Mr. Strachey too; but Mr. Bailey has been made a vicarious sacrifice; he is to carry on his back the bad taste of the English people—mine, yours, and that of the rest of us. For he, it seems, does not rate Racine very highly, places him, ‘not without contumely, among the second rank of writers’, whereas Mr. Strachey, on the contrary, puts him as high as one can go, and thinks Mr. Bailey’s ‘the average English view of the matter’, which he then proceeds to

<sup>1</sup> *Books and Characters*, by Lytton Strachey. Chatto and Windus, 1922.

show is by no means his own. This is high-sniffing criticism indeed, and can hardly be more exactly characterized than in Mr. Strachey's closing words on Lady Hester Stanhope, where he says that she lay back, 'inexplicable, grand, preposterous, with her nose in the air'. So, it seems to me, does Mr. Strachey lie back in his superb disdainful ease, having thrown Mr. Bailey into a corner of the room. Well, perhaps that is a little too sublime. It sent me back to Racine, at any rate, and will in due course send me on to Mr. Bailey, whose statement of the average English view I have not yet seen: meantime, as I don't suppose him likely to be more of an average Englishman than I am, I feel inclined to put down what has occurred to me on renewing, and bettering, the bowing acquaintance with Racine which I had before. The play in particular shall be *Andromaque*, though *Bajazet*, *Britannicus*, and *Athalie* equally invite me.

There is much to say of *Andromaque* which Mr. Strachey has not said; but before that I think there is one comment to be made on what he has said. It is singular to find him praising Racine for the very things which he blames in Voltaire. It was Voltaire's misfortune, he tells us,

‘to be for ever clogged by a tradition of decorous restraint; so that the effect of his plays is as anomalous as would be—let us say—that of a shilling shocker written by Miss Yonge. His heroines go mad in epigrams, while his heroes commit murders in inversions. Amid the hurly-burly of artificiality, it was all his cleverness could do to keep its head to the wind; and he was only able to keep afloat by throwing overboard his humour.’

That is, probably, Mr. Bailey's view of Racine; and

certainly all these griefs could be exhibited against the greater poet. If Mr. Strachey had subjected *Andromaque* to the sub-ironic analysis which *Alzire* undergoes at his hands, very much the same sorry effect would have been produced. You could extenuate *Hamlet*, *Job*, *Oedipus* on those terms, if it were worth your while. It is, of course, plain that 'decorous restraint' hampers Racine at every turn. It hampers him, but is at the same time his strength. That is true of all poetic form whatever. Channel your emotion deep enough, it will flow with the greater force. Hence the Sonnet, the Rime Royal, the Sestina, and the rest. Deep enough; but not so deep that, for the majority of your hearers, it should practically run underground. That is probably what Mr. Bailey finds, certainly what I and the 'average English taste' find, in Racine. The declamation carries the emotion over our heads, or under our feet —it doesn't matter which.

That may be attacked from another side. It may be said that the average English taste is unable to accept a merely rhetorical expression of passion. Verbal eloquence, verbal felicity, can do much, but not all. There comes a moment when Othello must use the pillow, or Polonius be run through the body. As we see the thing, action is the ultimate eloquence without which the tragedy becomes a weaving of gossamers. Sooner or later, we say, you must 'come to the 'osse'. The French don't feel that at all—or did not when Racine satisfied them. There they go, or went, much further than the Greeks who, in their tragedies, did provide a relief to rhetoric which they felt to be necessary. Racine and the French leave out the Chorus (except in *Athalie*, where it is no relief at all, but much the reverse) which in Greek drama gives exactly

what a drama of eloquence without action must have. The Chorus turned Greek tragedy into something like our Opera, where the orchestra is chorus, and a complete substitute for action. Or again, if you cannot have Chorus or orchestra (or even if you can), we demand another thing which Racine cannot give us. If we cannot have the fact in action, we must have the fact in word. I may say outright that that applies to all poetry whatsoever, not to dramatic poetry alone. But the fact is never in Racine's words. 'Songe, songe, Céphise,' says Andromache, recalling the sack of Troy,

Songe, songe, Céphise, à cette nuit cruelle,  
Qui fut pour tout un peuple une nuit éternelle.  
Figure-toi Pyrrhus, les yeux étincelants,  
Entrant à la lueur de nos palais brûlants—

She can go no nearer to the facts. And when she is rehearsing her final parting with Hector, all she can make of it is,

Chère épouse (dit-il, en essuyant mes larmes),  
J'ignore quel succès le sort garde à mes armes ;  
Je te laisse mon fils, *pour gage de ma foi*,  
S'il me perd, je prétends qu'il me retrouve en toi.

But what said Hector in the Sixth Iliad ?

Let not thy heart  
Be too much troubled, my love ; there is no man  
Shall drive me down to Hell against my fate ;  
But who shall avoid fate, once he is born,  
Coward or high of heart ? Now hie thee home,  
Set-to at loom or distaff, busy thyself,  
And bid thy maids be busy. As for war,  
That is the men's affair ; and it is mine  
Chiefest of all in Troy.

I ask to be forgiven a rough translation, which yet may serve to show one vital difference between real poetry and rhetoric. What time was that, pray, for a man to talk of a ‘gage de sa foi’? And how near does ‘en essuyant mes larmes’ go, as compared with

ἡ δὲ ἄρα μιν κηώδει δέξατο κόλπῳ  
δακρυόν γελάσασα—?

For the rest, the average English view of *Andromaque*, the view of any average man, not a Frenchman, would certainly be that Racine laid too much stress on the passion of love to be reasonable, and that he so treated that passion as to make it less tragic than absurd. Oreste making a goddess of Hermione; Pyrrhus, who has *Andromaque* as his captive, sacrificing his kingdom for the sake of matrimony; Hermione so much offended with Pyrrhus as to demand his life at the hands of Oreste, and so much in love with him that she throws over Oreste for obeying her —these are not reasonable situations, and therefore not tragic. They are artificial situations. The Greeks did not give love that place in the scheme of things; and the French only affected to do so. Strike a balance between Bussy’s sentiments about Mme. de Montglas before he quarrelled with her, and afterwards, and you will learn what the average French opinion was of woman. Exalted, overwhelming, devastating love—

Vénus toute entière, &c.

is a French convention, hardly now broken down.

But if Mr. Strachey really wants the average Englishman’s opinion of tragedy, he shall have it. It has nothing, I need not say, to do with Mr. Bailey’s opinion. I can give it in actual words as I heard it many years ago.

Irving had been playing *Hamlet*, and I in a throng was streaming, and steaming, out of the Lyceum pit. Two average Englishmen were shoulder to shoulder immediately in front of me. ‘H’m,’ said one to the other, summing it all up, ‘rather a melancholy affair.’

But at that I am afraid Mr. Strachey’s nose will have ‘outsoared the shadow of our night’.

## *Montaigne*

WE owe the Press many things, not all of them gladly ; but for one thing at least we may be its thankful debtors, and that is that it has allowed, if not engaged, the *Essay* to survive. From the days of Addison the essayist has been journalist too, and that which cost Montaigne a lifetime has thereafter been compassed within the year, if not to its advantage, then to its perennity. That is an accident of public economy, however, which is beside the matter, for both Montaigne and Bacon were very capable of journalism for all their leisurely habit. One was deeply versed in affairs, the other kept a wary eye for them and knew, as we put it, the time of day with the best. But politics was not Montaigne's business, who if he had been living to-day would be one of our best 'middle' practitioners, a writer deliberately desultory, occasional ; 'fluctuating and various', as he said ; a man not always, and never purposely, didactic, but, as he went on, not far from the vein of Polonius ; a full man, however, bursting with anecdote, and one of a singularly detached, dry, not to say frosty, judgement. I could name the weekly which he would adorn, and those which would have none of him. And the daily also. There is but one. I think he would be welcomed there.

The *Essay* may be *décousu* if the essayist pleases, and as Montaigne certainly did—that is, if himself is so. It is better thus, for the general, than that it should be crabbed, though personally I like close writing. It may,

indeed, be both crabbed and desultory ; and that was Montaigne's way ; for however much he might meander he had a serried mind and massed himself upon his points as they turned up. That was by no means in any orderly sequence, as he proves abundantly by thrusting his tenderest reminiscences of his father into his Essay *De l'Yvrongnerie*, with which the worthy man had nothing at all to do. He slips into them by exclaiming, 'C'est merveille des contes que j'ay ouy faire à mon père de la chasteté de son siècle', and breaks them off abruptly with, 'Revenons à nos bouteilles'. That is so desultory as to be casual ; yet the simplicity of handling rids it of offence. He adored his father. The occasion of his writing Essays may account for the form which they took. He began by making extracts from the Classics into a commonplace book. Thereafter, when a subject occurred to him, he looked through his notes, picked his quotations, and there, practically, you were. He picked too many, and used them all. Some of his early essays merely strung them together like beads. But he set the fashion which did not forsake us till the other day (and then for a very good reason) and became a quarry for his disciples, as Burton of the *Anatomy* also became. Men went to Montaigne, not to follow out his vagaries but to stimulate their own. As he grew more into the work he was doing he improved vastly upon his first attempts. He kept closer to life, dealt less in general ideas. His citations then had point, by ceasing to be the only point. He is at his highest in his third Book, as in 'Sur des Vers de Virgile', and 'Du Repentir', and very nearly as good in the twelfth essay of the second Book : 'Apologie de Raimond de Sebonde'. In each of those three he has a subject close

to his heart—Love, Himself, Mankind. There, having something better to do, he makes the classics fetch and carry for him. Nobody who desires to know to what point detachment can be carried without ceasing to be human can afford to neglect the ‘*Apologie*’. It is the best alterative conceivable for what ills an excessive use of *Gulliver’s Travels* may have induced in the reader. ‘J’ay veu en mon temps cent artisans, cent laboureurs, plus sages et plus heureux que des Recteurs de l’Université.’ And again, ‘La peste de l’homme c’est l’opinion de sçavoir.’ And once more, ‘Notre bien-estre, ce n’est que la privation d’estre mal. Voylà pourquoy la secte de philosophie qui a le plus faict valoir la volupté encore a-elle rangée à la seule indolence.’ The last is a paradox which I don’t admit, except as a masterly reduction of facts to an absurdity. As you read you can see the frosty old eyelids glimmering over it.

With those and certain other exceptions, I don’t pretend to idolatrous admiration of Montaigne. I will play with anybody at anything up and down the world, but must know what game it is we are playing. Montaigne does not. There never was a man who cared less for sum-m-ject and om-m-ject. Though he prefers to handle general notions, he takes them by the handful at a time; and I don’t believe you will find a core of idea in an essay of his. Sometimes he will intend for one and never reach it. There is an essay of good length in the Second Book called ‘*Coustume de l’Isle de Cea*’, in which there is not a word either of the island or the custom, whatever it was. He had not reached them, I suppose, by the time he was tired. One in the Third Book, ‘*Des Coches*’, opens with a discussion of the habit of blessing the sneezer—a

pretty oblique attack. But one does not go to Montaigne to find a theme stated, or disquisition festooned about a peg. He is one to be opened at hazard ; a good man for the *sortes*. You will find wisdom on every page : ‘Le prix de l’âme ne consiste pas à aller haut, mais ordonnément. Sa grandeur ne s’exerce par de la grandeur, c’est en la médiocrité ;’ many a sharp sentence : ‘Nos folies ne me font pas rire; c’est nos sapiences’ ; a pungency, a salt ; but you will seldom be touched either to laughter or tears ; and for a kindly old man, as he surely was, he is curiously without charm. He had friends—he tells us so ; but they were few, and in general he held men at arm’s length. ‘La froideur de ma conversation m’a desrobé avec raison la bienvaillance de plusieurs.’ How many friends has he made since his death ? Think of him beside Burton, Sir Thomas Browne, Charles Lamb. If the whole of his book had been as the last half of it we might have had a different feeling towards him. If his heart had gone in, ours might have gone out. His writing mellows as it goes on, as no doubt he did himself. Whether it tells us anything is another matter.

With this key

Shakespeare unlocked his heart . . . .

that is, with the sonnet. Can that be said of Montaigne and the Essay ? If the essayist is not personal he is nought, and may as well class himself pamphleteer at once. Personal they have been, one and all, importing their egos into any argument whatsoever, allowing no other staple, considering no appeals. Except lyric poetry, I suppose there is no such fun in the world, given the knack, as essay-writing. You write of what you know best and love best. ‘Son plus laborieux et principal estude c’est s’estudier soy’,

Montaigne reported of his own wit. That is by no means to say that he publishes all his discoveries. Other things besides interest go into the study. Vanity goes in; prejudice is never out. Humility may be under the table, and modesty have her back to the wall. When you read Montaigne upon *le Repentir* you may think he has told you everything, so much has he the air of having discharged his bosom. Analyse the essay and you will find that he has indeed been frank about his tower, chamber, library, and *basse-cour*, but singularly discreet about himself and his own plenishings. A word or two of his habits—eating, drinking, sleeping: nothing else, and nothing that matters. After studying the subject for forty years, that is not all he had learned. It is what he has thought fit to tell, and I don't think that either modesty or humility held his hand.

For that apparent candour and real secretiveness, I conclude, and not because he was perfectly calm about the St. Bartholomew and the like of that, Michelet could not find a good word to say for him. Certainly, if a man is writing the History of France he may be pardoned for losing patience with a man or with mankind. Man as he ought not to be was good enough for Montaigne, whose historical researches went no further than the fall of the Roman Empire, and could not have discovered him much about the French one even if he had been concerned about it. No doubt also that he took more interest in Man than in men. He was ever a solitary. He mentions the Wars of Religion rarely, and mostly as a bore. He reports that he has seen men burnt for religion's sake—‘ces pauvres gens’—and has remarked their wild devotions in the midst of the fire. By such exercises, he deems, they kept the faith, or rather

they gave it new direction ; which, he goes on, says much for their piety, little for their constancy. He is woundily right, as usual, but it is a hard saying. There are not many more references to passing events : the Execution of Mary Stuart is one, and no reprobation for it. He calls François II, her first husband, the greatest king in Christendom, which is a compliment probably to the realm rather than to the little monarch. As for his own beliefs, he professed himself a Catholic, and purposed to live and die in that persuasion—as in fact he did. For all that appears he was what we call a deist. The *Paternoster* was enough prayer for him ; but there is as little about the Saviour in the *Essais* as there is in *Lycidas*, nothing of the Madonna, nothing of the hierarchies except a good story of an old woman who was found with two tapers alight before the altar of St. Michael, one for him and one for the dragon. I think Montaigne burnt his candles in duplicate too. He was, and professed to be, the man of common sense, the average concupiscent male who had contrived to temper appetite by maintaining an accurate view of the consequences of indulgence. He positively declined to regret anything he had done. ‘Si j’avois à revivre, je revivrais comme j’ay vescu.’ That is the saying of a very sincere or very foolish man. Myself, I believe him.

I have been led away from the *Essais* to consider the Essayist, a vain exercise if I am right in thinking that he purposely spun himself out of sight in them. No matter for that : he has done his work, done it so well that from his day to our own the form has persisted without any material change. If one had to define the Essay it would be as the written, after-dinner monologue of a well-read, well-satisfied man of, at least, five-and-forty. Years don’t

matter : the spirit of years matters very much. You must be mature enough to pontificate and wise enough to do it tactfully. You must not be long, you should not be difficult ; you may be discursive, but not abrupt. You may eschew eloquence and outrageous fun ; you should subserve the chuckle. You may bedew the eyes, not drown them. You may not take sides, nor improve the occasion. Your teaching must be by the way. ‘Je n’enseigne point,’ Montaigne says, ‘je raconte’. You will be allusive, of course—all full men are so ; and you will quote freely, often inaccurately. Anecdote should be your salt, but I don’t think quotation should be your pepper.

It was Montaigne’s undoubtedly, and, like his anecdotes, almost entirely of one people and language. It was very well for his auditory of the moment which, with him, spoke Latin at least as well as French—he himself spoke it better. But that implacable people, the Romans, have receded far from us. Neither Troy nor Rome stands where it did. Our essayists have since discovered other nations. First it was Israel, and you had Abishai and Aholibah, Hophni and Phineas walking familiarly in the page ; next it was Shakespeare ; and now we have more Keats than we really need. But certainly we are more temperate, or more ignorant, than our fathers ; and at least we are short. So had I better be.

## *Dreams*

No man can command his dreams, though poets have feigned and philosophers pretended it. If we could do that, it may well be that we should ere now have abolished marriage, over-population,—or any,—murder, art, minor poetry, nay, the world itself, ‘annihilating all that’s made’. But that cannot be; and although it is very true that dreams may be induced, the period of gestation is not known. I have thought sometimes that those which report themselves in a foreign language follow immediately upon an evening’s reading in it, and would go so far as to trace an elephantine or grasshopper style in them, as the case may be, to previous conversation with Boswell or R. L. Stevenson: but such inductions need careful record, which I have not kept. I don’t doubt that ninety-nine failures would smother one successful observation, and remain at present of opinion that the dream-self is not to be cajoled any more than forced into instant service. And a good thing, too, otherwise he would add to our burden of drowsy syrups, as a pair of emotional knights have done of late, to the increase of lotophagy and detriment of common sense.

It is otherwise with those visions of semi-consciousness, which are worth cultivating since they are the sure preludes of sleep. I can nearly always bring them about; and very curious, very startling they are, and worthy of record were any means of recording them convenient. Out of a luminous mist, through a drifting rosy cloud,

a face resolves itself in strong light, sometimes minute, but perfect in every detail, as if it was seen through the small glass of the telescope ; more often of full size ; sometimes growing as it nears the dreamer ; sometimes coming so close as to merge into his face. That may or may not be a pleasant thing ; for beautiful as some of the faces are, others are more hideous than life could endure, some repulsive, some malignant, some bestial, some horribly maimed—one-eyed, hanging-lipped, swollen, broken, sodden. They change aspect rapidly as you watch them ; from being beautiful beyond expression in words they become frightful in deformity. They are never more than a face, never speak, though they are eloquent of moral quality ; they are never constant, but always transitional. Well, those you can obtain. The lit clouds must come first, and some amount of light, or some recent commerce with light, will make sure of them. The visions resolve themselves therefrom. Once you have them, in my experience, sleep is at hand.

Such dreams, to call them so, differ from the common kind in that they do not transcend time and space. They can be closely observed, for measurable moments. But in real dreams the observer is washed out, and a being half-actor, half-spectator, takes his place. Real dreams will show you an eternity in a second, and expand a drawing-room into rolling landscape or the great ocean itself. You step stark naked out of a railway carriage and are in the crowded street. You don't step—you are transported ; you cannot mark your own transit ; the dream thinks it, and it is. And it may be observed here that although you suffer agonies of shame, nobody else in the throng of traffickers is in the least offended. That should convince

anybody but a thaumaturgic knight that dreaming is a subjective affair. You move the people in your dream, but not morally : they enhance but do not influence your acts. Your dream is a monodrama, like *Maud*.

So it is with the locale of the dream. I have no experience where anything more than the 'feeling' of a landscape has been rendered by a dream. You are on the sea, or in it—but it is sea in the abstract, the idea of sea. You are in the hills—but any hills. There are no seasons in dreams : the sun does not shine, nor the rain fall ; the air (if air there be) is flat calm. All that makes a queer hot-house business of them, a stage-business, and is a great part of the unreality of dreams in general. So it is, once more, with the persons of your dream. How rarely you are conscious of the faces of the players, even while you are aware of their personalities ! It may be, of course, that the dreamer as little regards the faces of his acquaintance as the waking creature those of his. I don't remember ever having been surprised by any strange appearance. Either I knew the persons I met with, or it was as if I knew them. One point I must allow to their psychical worships, and let them make what they can of it. My commerce in dreams, so far as it has been with persons of waking acquaintance, lies with the long-absent of the dead. My father, for instance, who has been dead thirty years, is commonly in my dreams ; my mother, who is alive, very rarely.<sup>1</sup> Of my sisters, the one who is dead is often with me in the night, the living seldom or never. The greatly-loved come rarely : my love-affairs are with women who, awake, would be strangers to me. So far as

<sup>1</sup> Since this was written, alas ! she has joined my father ; and now they both enter my dreams.

I can judge, ordinary morality does not exist in the dream-world.

Of dreams themselves, many are trivial, most are transient; and of many only the substance remains, a specific horror, a specific delight. Some of them touch you to the point of tears, and, on waking, nothing but tears remain. Two only I remember as complete in themselves, one a comedy, one as tragic as you please.

The comedy, to call it so, was laid in Italy, I think in the outskirts of Florence. I was conscious of a slope, coarse grass, and olive-trees overhead. I was at a picnic with a young man whom I seemed to know slightly, his handsome silent wife, and a Turk in a fez. A man who may have been a courier waited upon us. The young man was giving the luncheon, but the Turk, an accomplished cosmopolitan portly person of something over forty, was sustaining the conversation. He spoke fluently, I think in French, addressed himself to the company at large, got few replies, and apparently needed none. I don't know how I became aware of what, as we went on, was so obvious; but the fact was that the young man was heavily in the Turk's debt, so heavily and so hopelessly that he had lost his honour as well as his means. It became evident that the luncheon, the very spoons and forks, the wine and the wine-cooler were all, in point of fact, the Turk's. The debtor was aware of it, and past caring; his wife was aware of it, but was to become more so. The climax was unforeseen, and I think very dramatic. The courier was going about the table with wine. He filled my glass, passed over the Turk, filled his master's glass, and was about to fill the lady's, when the Turk said quietly, 'In my country our women take no wine.' He stated it as

a fact worth mentioning ; but the servant perceived his intention and left the lady's glass unfilled. Then I became aware that the young man had mortgaged his wife to the Turk, and that the mortgagee had thus foreclosed. I awoke just there, trembling with excitement. Comedy I have called it, regarding its play upon humours ; yet it had in it the elements of tragedy to come.

My tragic dream fell into two parts. As in the former one, the drama was as much to be felt as it was seen.

There was an evening-party in an upstairs room ; a crowd of people, and a clear half-circle about the piano. Two women sang, one after the other ; one was in white, one in black. I remember the dark woman. She was tall, pale-faced, with a great swelling throat. They sang against each other, and as they sang the whole assembly hotly took sides. Rivalry, faction, was all over the room, and grew intolerably. It was more than passionate—hot, white-hot, vindictive. As always, the feeling of the dream was as vivid as the vision. The scene abruptly changed. Supper was going on in a room below : I heard the buzz of talk, the clatter of knives and plates. But I was not there. I was on the staircase dimly lighted. There also was the singer in white, huddled half-way up the stair, staring and dead. A steel carving-fork was through her temples, and pinned her to the stair.

## *Work and ‘Business’*

A RECENT novel by Mr. Charles Marriott, allusively and not too happily named *The Grave Impertinence*, apart from its merits as a straightforward account of real people, is interesting, and not at all impertinent, to a time like the present. He deals with the exploitation of a village in West Somerset by a syndicate of which a Jew financier is the leading spirit, with the instinctive though passive opposition of the village itself through its virtual squire, a resident Major-General, and the final break-away of the actual squire, a *parvenu* who had put himself and the village destinies into the Jew's hands.

You witness, or you might witness, an engagement in the long war which will soon be raging over the length of our land—feudalism and tradition fighting for their lives, if it were not that Mr. Marriott suggests more than he exhibits: that is the weakness of his book, both as novel and sociological pamphlet. Except for the Major-General and his jolly daughter, who are cultivated people with all sorts of prejudices and instincts which village people are without, the village itself does not appear. We are told; it is true, that it distrusted its Mr. Penkevil, the Cornishman who had bought and proposed to enrich it by intensive fruit-culture, furniture-making, and the production of ‘Light Metal’, that it was reassured upon learning that his mother was, however, a native, and much more coming-on in disposition when he finally threw over the syndicate and ranged himself with the ancient ways—but in a novel you

must see things, not read about them. I think that Mr. Marriott has been too cavalier with Hinton Causeway. We don't even know the sign of its public-house; and of its inhabitants, except gentry, not a word. Yet there is a point; and a point which Reconstructionists would do well to consider. The General was right. We do not, in the village, understand 'big business', but we do know all about 'the parish pump'. The antithesis is Mr. Marriott's, and the theme of his novel. To our minds the parish pump is—the pump of the parish. There is a real point there, and a sharp one.

When we say that the English village is an enclave we are only extending the familiar maxim about the Englishman's house. The neolithic village was to all intents a castle, and (like Maiden Castle) so called to this day. We are not very fond of strangers in either; if we don't call them foreigners we feel them to be so. We are built upon tradition; the village itself, both the fabric and the spirit of that little body politic, is emplaced tradition; but it is so intensely local that it varies from hamlet to hamlet. You must be of it, yourself in the tradition, before you can understand it. Here is reason enough for our distrust of syndicates. If you desire another you will get it from Mr. Marriott in the distinction which he draws between 'work' and 'business'—work, where the thing doing or done counts for as much as the value obtained, and business, where the one can only be reckoned in terms of the other, and both are dependent upon something which may have no ostensible relation to the matter in hand.

Those of us who like work—and there are such, though you might not think it—love the doing of it more than what is to be made out of it, and will risk a good deal for

the sake of right performance. Some vanity perhaps, some *amour propre*, goes to that honourable zeal, but more of the artist's enthusiasm. Craft is rare in the villages in these days, but was general once. Wheelwrights and smiths we have still, but there were straw-plaiting, glove-making, weaving, basket-making, and no doubt some iron-working. Some of these have been revived, sporadically, of late years, but it is early days to look there for the pride of craftsmanship. It is to the land, and to the men employed on it, that you must go to find out how much will be sacrificed to the ideal. I know a man who sacrificed his livelihood to it, a carter by calling. One afternoon he had brought his teams back to the yard at the regular hour for grooming and bedding-down. The master came out and wanted one of them to go into town to fetch a load of cake. My friend said that he had none fit. He was told, Then he must send one unfit. He looked about him, and smiled, as he always does when his heart is fixed. He said, He didn't know how that might be. The horses had done a full day's work, and (it was during the war) on short rations. The farmer grew hot, and asked if he was not the master. You are, said my man, the master of me, but not of the horses while I am head-carter. He was dismissed on the spot, but bedded down his horses before he left. He was owed for a week's work, and there were Michaelmas moneys due to him too. He had to sue for those, but failed to get them. The County Court judge was hard of hearing, and may not have appreciated the rights of a tale told in broad Doric. I never heard my friend complain. That was pure idealism. There was no question of his being kept out late himself. If he had gone there it would have been overtime for him, and he

was not a man to refuse extra money. But, in fact, he would have sent one of his young men.

Now that is a kind of thing which workmen understand, and business men should understand, but often do not. If the business is a syndicate, in a large way of trade, animals and machines, with the men who handle them, are all tools alike. It then becomes a matter of calculation, an actuary's matter. Is it worth while to lay out so much horse-flesh, man-flesh, petrol and grease, wear-and-tear, for such and such return? Village people don't understand that theory of work, and when they do (for you can teach a man anything), then one of two things—either they jib, or they apply it to themselves. If you teach a workman that he is assets, he may begin to regard himself as a business, and his energy and sinews as capital, which indeed they are. If, then, it appears possible to him to shirk your business to the advantage of his own, he will do so; and sugaring begins, and 'calling canny'. Bad things for him, those, and against his nature; bad things for his village, and for his country. In the towns men have been denaturalized. A state of things has grown up which has destroyed tradition, obliterated the finer instincts, poisoned family life, cut away hope and good pride from men. The villages feel that and, without knowing why, hold out against Collectivism.

All this bears hardly upon the Socialists who wish to nationalize the sources of wealth and run the industries of Britain from an office and switch-board in Whitehall. The day may come when such a policy will commend itself to country people. It has not come yet. We fear, we fight against, centralization in local government; and so, if I

may trust Michelet, we have done for many centuries. Writing of the efforts of Duke Philip and Duke Charles of Burgundy to centralize their government and rule the Low Countries from Dijon, and of the system of judicial appeal which, by their establishment, lay from the villages through the town, the city, the county, to the Duke in his capital, he says :

'At every step this right was disputed, to every man it was hateful, because in removing decision from the local tribunal you removed it also from the custom of the country, from old and well-beloved legal prescriptions. The higher justice mounted the more abstract it became, the more general, hard-and-fast, unimaginative : the more rational possibly, but often the less reasonable.'

So it is with us. From the Parish—to the District, thence to the County-Council, thence to the smooth young docketters of the Ministry—at every stage the villager finds that out, and the difference there may be between rationality and reason. Nothing more fatal to contentment down here, nothing more unreasonable could ever be devised by doctrinaires than such a scheme, for instance, as that outlined in the famous, dormant Minority Report upon the Poor Law. Tradition would shriek if that were ever applied ; and tradition is our life. Mr. Marriott is quite right. You cannot work the parish pump from a Battersea power-station.

## *The Morris*

THE other day, being on a visit near Oxford, I was taken to Longworth in Berks., to a fine old stone manor-house in that grey village, where, on the lawn before it, we were to see the Morris danced—the real Morris, survival and not revival, which to my mind is as the difference between chalk and cheese. On the way there, as I feel bound to record, we had the pain of seeing the destruction of a landmark which can never be revived. We were about to turn into the Fyfield road, when lo ! at the corner stood the ‘Fyfield Tree’ of *Thyrsis*, girdled with fire and on the point to fall. When we came back in the evening she was prone, never again to flush in the Spring. These things must happen, and death by violence may sometimes be necessary. Let me give the date for those who wish to gloze their Matthew Arnold. It was the 18th of August, 1921.

Before the Morris we had country dancing by some girls. We had Sellenger’s Round, Newcastle, and Princess Royal. I asked for Packington’s Pound, but they didn’t know it. They were jolly, fresh-coloured, healthy girls, nimble on their feet ; but I am not going to pretend that they danced. They tripped it on the grass, as the song says ; but when you *dance* more than your feet go to work. There was one, a slim, sharp-faced child with a flaxen pig-tail, who *danced*. She danced with her eyes, which is what you want. The others, as I say, tripped it, grew excessively hot, poor dears, and made me hot, vicariously hot, because they were

unsuitably dressed. Being girl-guides, they were in uniform: blue serge, and tight at that. They would have been happier, and so vicariously should I, had they been in linen smocks. But they looked very smart, until they grew hot.

Then came in the Morrisers, antick creatures indeed. Five of them in all, in whom I saw represented component parts of our composite nation. Two were Saxon giants, hulking young men, fair and flushed, with round beardless faces which looked as if roughed out in wood. Their eyes were very blue, and they had no expression whatever as they jigged. Then there was a Dane—obviously: a God-smitten Dane. He was inclined to the foxy in complexion: I daresay they called him Ginger at home. He was thin and angular, a stony young man whose like you might have seen doing gargoyle work for the guttering of the church. But he danced, good lack, as if in the presence of the Heavenly Host. His eyes were fixed and glazed, his mouth was open, his head was rigid on his shoulders; but with his legs and tossing arms he danced like one possessed. He danced by rote, he danced because he must: there was something epileptic in his dancing, as you see it in Dervishes in Africa. One expected him to fall suddenly, to foam at the mouth, lie jerking on the sward. But he survived to be something of a hero among the women, who looked upon him, I think, as afflicted by God, and therefore a thing of value.

The leader, however, the leader was of the Mediterranean race, of a stock older than history—a little dark-skinned, alert, rapid, humorous man. He played on a fiddle as he led his band, and danced doubled-up, with much lifting of the feet, and his knees sometimes near his sharp chin.

Our Dane danced because he must ; the Iberian because he loved it.

It was an uncouth, really (at our time of day) almost a scandalous performance ; more like the Russian's *Sacre du Printemps* than you would believe, or might care about. Some of it, like the *Sacre*, was mere jigging up and down, rapid and incessant, punctuated at irregular intervals by leaps in the air. There were country-dances in it too—that is, of course, *contre-dances* ; looking carefully, one could detect certain revivals : one where two danced face to face, with handkerchiefs in their hands which they flourished at each other and clashed together. That betrayed itself, that it had once been a war-dance. Another, in which one man seemed to fly, one to pursue, in which the hunted seemed to invite the hunter, with a swift skirting movement, his feet aslide, and one elbow crooked—that was the eternal invitation to pursuit and capture, the love-chase of high antiquity. Whether the complacent matrons, young wives and mothers who were looking on—for the Women's Institute of Longworth was present in force—would have still looked on had they realized what it all meant, or had once meant, I cannot say. They were much amused—that's certain.

The Morrisers came from Bampton across the river, where the dance is traditional. The leader, by profession a blacksmith, told me that he had had it from his father and grandfather, taking it by inheritance with the clothes which he wore. All five of them were in white duck jackets and shorts, with white stockings, and knee and elbow knots of many-coloured tapes. Round their shins they had pads of that kind of carpet which village wives make for themselves of rags. They had white double-breasted waistcoats, and round felt hats with cocks-feathers in them.

It was a strange performance, rather unpleasing than not. It wanted grace, it wanted (except in the leader) gusto. It did not express the best of the people, nor the worst of them either; did not really express anything at all except a limping ritual only half-remembered. Those who first uttered themselves so had been not far removed from the beasts. The Morris has become a vestige, like the Fyfield elm, or the rudimentary tail. But I am glad to have seen it.

## *Theology and Fine Women*

I AM far from saying that the themes are incompatibles, though personally I have never met with them juxtaposed. Woman, and above all a fine woman, in Count Smorlork's phrase, 'surprises by herself'; but how very much more she would surprise if in the pauses of her proper affair she were to repulse your advances as follows :

'Sir, you are an entire stranger to me, and to declare a passion on a few hours' acquaintance, must be either to try my weakness, or because you think a young woman is incapable of relishing anything but such stuff when alone in conversation with a gentleman. I beg then I may hear no more of this; and as I am sure you can talk upon many more rational subjects, request your favour to give me your opinion on some articles in this Hebrew Bible you see lying open on the table in this room. My father, Sir, among other things, has taken great pains to instruct me . . . and has taught me to read and understand this inspired Hebrew book; and says we must ascribe primaevity and sacred prerogative to this language. For my part, I have some doubts as to this matter. . . . Tell me, if you please, what you think of the thing.'

It is not every lover, ardent even as this young lady's was, who would be prepared with reflections and observations upon the Tower of Babel and its far-flung sequel at a moment's—and such a moment's—notice. But the hero of the adventure from which I have quoted was more than equal to it. He discoursed at immense length, then renewed his attack, and secured the 'illustrious maid' for his

own, or very nearly. Unfortunately she died a fortnight before the happy day. She was the first of many to be won in like circumstances, and quick succession. The susceptible and accomplished wooer before the book's end was seven times a widower. His name was John Buncle, Esquire, and I have just been reading his *Life and Adventures*.

It is much easier to believe that John Buncle lived, had seven wives before he was thirty, and travelled for weeks on end in Westmorland over mountains as high as the Himalayas, and rivers as wide as the Ganges than it is to realize that one Thomas Amory invented him. If one thinks of Thomas Amory at all, it is rather to suppose him the invention of John Buncle. 'Who is the Potter, pray?' Everybody's answer would be that John Buncle was he; but really it is not so. Thomas Amory, the fourth of a line of those names, was living in Westminster, with a country cottage at Hounslow, in 1756 when he published *John Buncle*. He lived secluded, I have read, was a man of 'a very peculiar look and aspect, yet', if you please, 'with the manners of a gentleman'. I am glad to believe that your look and aspect, which you cannot help, do not interfere with your manners, which I thought you could. He seldom went abroad before dusk, 'like a bat'; and he wandered the streets 'in abstract meditation'. The inference intended to be drawn by his biographer is that Amory was mad; but I don't at all agree with that. Still, I am ready to own that he has written the oddest novel in the world. You must not say that a man is mad because he likes odd things, and makes a novel about them. Nor—even—are the things themselves odd things for a

man to like. Theology is not an odd thing; fine women are a very delightful thing, and not so odd, either, as you might think; scenery is not at all odd. The oddness of *John Buncle* lies in the collocation. Amorous dalliance—‘sweet reluctant amorous delay’—enhanced by discussion of the *homoiousion*; Socinian nunneries in Westmorland valleys; a Thebaid in Stainmore Forest; chapters of romance devoted to the theory and practice of Fluxions—these are the features of no ordinary novel. Finally, an art which through spoil-tips and mountains of pedantry is so contrived as to foster the illusion that you are reading the real memoirs of a seven-times married Unitarian hero is not the work of a madman. *John Buncle* is a prodigal book, a book of abounding gusto and high spirits. Though it is absurd to say, as Hazlitt does, that Amory was the English Rabelais, *John Buncle* has the superabundance and ‘fine excess’ of Rabelais. If Westmorland is not as he makes it out, if you cannot there travel ‘into a vast valley, enclosed by mountains whose tops were above the clouds’, and so come into ‘a country that is wilder than the Campagna of Rome, or the uncultivated vales of the Alps and Apennines’; if you find not up there a mountain to cross, whose ‘air was piercing cold, on account of its great height, and so subtle, that we breathed with difficulty, and were a little sick’—well, it is a pity. As John Buncle says, ‘the scene was prodigiously fine. *Sub pedibus ventos et rauca tonitrua calcat.*’ I don’t at all quarrel with Karakoram at Brough under Stainmore, nor will any reader.

And who would not desire, in the same Salvator landscape, to light upon Burcot Lodge, and be welcomed there by Azora, lady superior of a ‘little female republic’?

'She was attended by ten young women, straight, clean, handsome girls, and surpassed them in tallness. Her countenance was masculine, but not austere; her fine blue eyes discovered an excellence of temper, while they showed the penetration of her mind. Her hair was brown, bright and charming; and nature had stamped upon her cheek a colour that exceeded the most beautiful red of the finest flower. . . . She was dressed in a fine woollen stuff, made in the manner shepherdesses are painted, and on her head had a band or fillet like what the ladies now wear, with a bunch of artificial flowers in her hair. She had a very small straw hat on. In her hand she held a long and pretty crook; and as her coats were short, her feet were seen, in black silk shoes and the finest white stockings, and appeared vastly pretty.'

I should think so. Well, then, if this compleat and dainty shepherdess should in the course of conversation discover 'an amazing collection of the most rational philosophic ideas'; if she should 'deliver them in the most pleasing dress, with as much ease as she breathed'; and do it, mind you, 'after I had feasted upon an excellent supper', all I have to say is that that reader is hard to please who will not take the rough with the smooth, take down the theology like a digestive pill after supper, and even be ready for more on the same terms after breakfast in the morning. John Buncle took theology in his stride from wife to wife. But he did not marry Azora. She was vowed to celibacy, and he made the best of it. Besides, she died before he could manage.

All his wives were lovely creatures, and all Unitarians, prepared to uphold their faith against any adversary. They all had money, which fell to Buncle, and they all died as

extremely short notice. This is so much the case that one thinks it must have become a habit; a habit also which spread itself outside matrimony to other divine beings upon whom he looked with an eye to closer relations. Miss Noel, for instance, who at first subdued his ardour with Hebrew disquisitions but later consented to be his, died of the smallpox within a fortnight of making him the happiest of men. Azora, the talented head of the female republic, did not long survive his attentions. As for his wives, no sooner were they become so than the grave gaped for them. ‘I laid my Antonia by my Charlotte and my Statia, and then rode off.’ In two days’ time he is at Harrogate. ‘While I was there, it was my fortune to dance with a lady, who had the head of Aristotle, the heart of a primitive Christian, and the form of the Venus de Medicis. . . . I was not many hours in her company before I became most passionately in love with her.’ He obtained her—a Miss Spence of Westmorland—and in six months she died of a malignant fever. On one occasion, however, he gave way prematurely to habit, and buried a wife, Miss Dunk by name, before she was dead. Doctor Stainville exhumed and married her. Buncle did not like it, but he had committed himself by a too impulsive act. It was his only indiscretion of the kind.

Hazlitt, in praising this book, calls it a Unitarian romance, but in another place speaks of the vanity of strewing the flowers of poetry round the borders of that spiky creed. Naturally you cannot use poetry, which consists in affirmations, to embellish a theory of the universe made up mainly of negations. But *John Buncle* is nothing of the sort. Rather it is a romance for Uni-

tarians. It will conduct them to an island of the blest where 'glorious girls' or 'angels in human form' will minister to their passionate part, and yet lay them out St. Athanasius in a spare moment as easily as a piece of crochet work. We are fallen upon lean years. You do not find such beings in Westmorland now.

## *Dedications*

SACRIFICE, no doubt, has a value strictly relative to the giver. That was the judgement of supreme authority. Yet it had been felt to be a ponderable thing, otherwise Agamemnon would not have offered up his daughter in Tauris. She was a great king's daughter, worth, he would have argued, many sparrows, or lowlier virgins. So a cathedral beat back greater merit upon a conqueror than a parish church, and ten masses did more for your soul than one. Here is the old confusion between the big and the great, to which patriarchs have lent themselves as well as kings—but I have no wish to be a ram caught in a thicket of theology, though that image reminds me of the sharp rebuke to Abraham's fallacy. I had intended to begin by saying that when you dedicate a book to a man you turn him, for the occasion, into a god. His lap, or his drawing-room table, is an altar, and you on your knees before it, oblation in hand. Your praises of him flow upwards to his nostrils, and the more they tickle them the sweeter will be the ebb of the wave into your own. Also it is actually necessary that you should believe him a valid god, for the moment, or (of course) that he should really be one: otherwise, on the rebound, you may feel that you have made an ass of yourself—which nobody likes to feel.

There, to go no further, is reason for the once common practice of dedicating to the sovereign, King's or Queen's most excellent majesty. It may be out of favour now because majesty is so; but a little while ago kings were demi-divine, and as dispensers of blessings unequivocal.

One likeness to Olympians they certainly had: no reek of flattery could be too oily for their nostrils. It did not affront a shrewd and witty great lady to be called ‘the most high, mightie and magnificent Empress, renowned for Pietie, Vertue, and all gratiouse government’, or to have a poet ‘in all humilitie Dedicate, Present and Consecrate these his labours, to live with the Eternitie of her Fame.’ She took it as a matter of course; but Spenser, it is certain, felt the better of it, since it is his emendation of the first dedication of *The Faerie Queene*, a much more frugal sacrifice. So true it is that flattery flatters the flatterer.

Where a Spenser could stoop, other and smaller men would grovel and feel themselves the warmer for the princely foot. So Coryat, the Odcombian legstretcher, dedicated ‘serenissimo principi Henrico, Christiani orbis Tito, id est, humani generis Deliciis’, and, not content with that, re-dedicated his *Crudities* to each member of the royal family in turn—beginning again with the Titus of Christendom. Him he now addressed, ‘Most scintillant *Phosphorus* of our British Trinacria’, and much more to the same effect; and having, so to speak, begun with minerals, he went on with them and dug up some for everybody. Great James heard himself styled ‘most invincible Monarch of this thrice-renowned Albion (not *quasi ὄλβιον*, but *quasi Al-be-one*, in regard of the happie Union of England and Scotland) and the refulgent Carbuncle of Christendome’. It isn’t everybody who would like to be called a carbuncle, but James seems to have taken it in. The Queen was ‘most resplendent Gem and radiant Aurora of *Great Britaine’s* spacious Hemisphere’; Princess Elizabeth, ‘the true attractive Adamant of this famous Iland’; and Charles Duke of York, ‘most glittering Chrysolite of our English

diademe'. After that unhappy exhibition it is comfortable to read the sober and dignified prose in which John Fuller dedicated his father's *Worthies of England* to Charles II.

'To His Sacred Majesty.

'Most dread Sovereign: the tender of these ensuing collections is made with as much Fear and Reverence, as it was intended with Duty and Devotion by the *Author* whilst living. The Obligation that lieth upon me to endeavour him all right, forced me into this presumption. It is the first voice I ever uttered in this kind, and I hope it will be neither displeasing to Your Majesty, nor blamed by the World; whilst (not unlike that of the son of Croesus) it sounds loyalty to my sovereign, and duty to my father.'

He ends with a prayer for the happiness of King and people; and 'so prayeth your Majesty's meanest subject, the Author's orphan, John Fuller'.

When you remember that the King was but two years restored to his throne, and John Fuller a clergyman, you will agree with me that as a gentleman, a subject, and a son he distinguishes himself as much as Charles.

There is an obverse to all this gold-medalling, and perhaps no man is perfectly himself on his knees to a king. Nor is he, it may be, on his knees to anybody; yet in the way he turns his compliment, or even in the fact that he makes one at all, you may get an insight into his character. There was sound reason for the fact (as it seems to be) that Carlyle dedicated nothing of his. If that is true, it was because he was Carlyle, the most arrogant of the sons of men, and the most Scotch. Both elements are to be reckoned with. No Scotchman will put himself at a disadvantage if he can help it; but Carlyle probably could not

bring himself to believe that there was a man living to whom he should bend the knee. Johnson did not dedicate his Dictionary, and I understand him in so far as Lord Chesterfield was concerned. But did not Windham deserve it? Or him to whom Boswell in sober and becoming terms inscribed the Life—Sir Joshua Reynolds? ‘If a work should be inscribed to one who is master of the subject of it, and whose approbation, therefore, must insure it credit and success, the Life of Dr. Johnson is, with the greatest propriety, dedicated to Sir Joshua Reynolds, who was the intimate and beloved friend of that great man; the friend whom he declared to be “the most invulnerable man” he knew; whom, if he should quarrel with him, he should find the most difficulty how to abuse.’ Here is Bozzy like a gentleman.

And here is Wordsworth like Wordsworth, a man unable to understand that his books were not of universal import. How much of Wordsworth and how little of Charles Lamb is here :

‘MY DEAR FRIEND,—When I sent you a few weeks ago, “The Tale of Peter Bell”, you asked ‘Why “The Waggoner” was not added?’ To say the truth, from the higher tone of imagination, and the deeper touches of passion arrived at in the former, I apprehended this little piece could not accompany it without disadvantage. In the year 1806, if I am not mistaken, “The Waggoner” was read to you in manuscript. . . . Being, therefore, in some measure the cause of its present appearance, you must allow me the gratification of inscribing it to you, in acknowledgment of the pleasure I have derived from your writings, and the high esteem with which

I am very truly yours,

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.’

It is not saying much to say that that is how *not* to dedicate a book to a friend. Dedication is, no doubt, a compliment, and is intended to be so : the sound convention, however, is that it is the writer who is complimented by the opportunity to dedicate.

Ben Jonson had used the better way, in putting forth *Every Man in his Humour* ‘to the most learned, and my honor’d Friend, Mr. Cambden, Clarentiaux’.

‘Sir, there are, no doubt, a supercilious race in the world who will esteem all office done you in this kind an injurie. . . . But my gratitude must not leave to correct their error, since I am none of those that can suffer the benefits confer’d upon my youth to perish with my age. It is a fraile memory that remembers but present things : and, had the favour of the times so conspir’d with my disposition, as it could have brought forth other, or better, you had had the same proportion, and number of the fruits, the first. Now, I pray you, to accept this, such, wherein neither the confession of my manners shall make you blush, nor of my studies repent you to have been the Instructer: and, for the profession of my thankfulness, I am sure, it will, with good men, find either praise, or excuse.

Your true lover,

BEN JONSON.’

That is the way to dedicate a book—with all your heart. And that is how to write measured prose.

There is one other way, the way of free companions, the routier’s way. I have had one of these myself, and as such greetings are not so common with me I must be forgiven for closing with it. Here is a writer inscribing to his colleague in adventure ; poet to poet ; as minor as you please—but who cares ?

Hewlett ! as ship to ship  
Let us the ensign dip.  
There may be who despise  
For dross our merchandise,  
Our balladries, our bales  
    Of woven tales ;  
Yet, Hewlett, the glad gales  
Favonian ! And what spray  
    Our dolphins toss'd in play,  
Full in old Triton's beard, on Iris' shimmering veils !

That is to drink down with gallantry the poppies of oblivion,  
and to credit another with the same courageous philosophy.

## *Funketings New and Old*

THE great difference between Christmas past and Christmas present seems to be that it is no longer spent at home ; and that is all the difference in the world. If you are revelling publicly, at an hotel or restaurant, you are turning a festival into a festivity, a holiday into a beano. You will spend a vast deal more money—but that is part of the business, if you have slid, as it is so easy to slide, into the modern superstition that the more money you spend the more pleasure you will get. No doubt some people—Sardanapalus, Nero, Louis XIV, the Prince Regent—held to the same error long before our time ; but my point rather is that Tom, Dick, and Harry hold to it now—and that Mrs. Tom is of their opinion. However, I have no desire to speak of them, my lines being cast rather with those who have none too much money or credit to spend, the meek who have literally inherited the earth in these days when the proud have filled the hotels and left the country to them. The meek, as always, stay at home for Christmas. They don't go to Brighton, as the nearest they can manage to the Riviera, nor to Hampstead Heath as their equivalent of Mürren. For them Christmas is still a children's feast. They are the stocking-stuffers, the tree-dressers. If chestnuts are still to be roasted, it is their fingers that will be burned ; if raisins are still to be hot in the mouth, they will set the snap-dragon bowl ; if blindman's buff is not as dead as Dickens, it is in the revealing windows of mean streets, or behind the lit panes of cottage casements that you must

look for it. I can't now speak for Londoners—it is long since I was one ; but for village-people I can answer, that children rule the roast at Christmas, as indeed they pretty much do at all times of the year.

I was thinking when I began to write, of the mighty as well as the rich—for not all of them are rich alike—who, whether rich or not, always made the most show, and still do. But here is another difference in the spirit of their revelry now, that whether Christmas be spent at home or not, it is not spent in the country. The great houses of to-day are shut up, some of them because they are shut *down*, others because their owners please to be elsewhere. So far as country life is concerned now, we have come to the end of a dispensation, and must prepare ourselves for changes which will be serious, and even tremendous. The 'great house' is ceasing to be reckoned with in the country ; soon it will simply cease to be. Hard times, change of habit, it's all one. We must learn to do without his lordship or 'Squire'. What he does with himself at Christmas ; whether he dines and jazzes at a London hotel or a Swiss, or at Cannes or in Cairo, we need not inquire. We have learned to do without him, are learning slowly to do for ourselves. Since the war we have picked up a thing or two ; the gentle uses of clubs, the benefit of an Entertainments Committee whose business it is to keep things alive. Nowadays there must be no week without some kind of a show. Dancing is our great discovery ; we have taken kindly to that. I am sure it is pure gain. For in dancing women come by their own—and by no means only pretty women : accomplished women too, graceful women, charming women. They must be sought, in dancing. They have favours to bestow, and they are aware of it. Those

things mark a great advance. Few habits spread so quickly as ceremonial observance. It is essential to the dance ; it is becoming (as it should be) necessary to courtship. Who is to say that it will not swim over the married estate, so that the young man who sought his partner's favours in the dance may not find himself presently striving to deserve them in that longer and more complicated figure which is life in couples ? But I am forgetting Christmas.

We don't feast in public in the country, though we dance in that fashion. Our revelling, if we are cottagers, is strictly kept at home. '*A cada puerco viene su San Martin*', said Sancho. The proverb holds in the West of England. St. Martin is a wailful season, the air throbs with it ; but one gets used to such things, and besides—one looks forward. On this very day of writing, within five hundred feet of my house, a farmyard has been turned into a shambles. A hecatomb of turkeys have paid the bill for their year of high living. That was no road for one's morning stroll. Heavens ! and yesterday I saw those noble birds like ships in full sail—'with all their bravery on, and tackle trim, Sails filled, and streamers waving'—swelling and curveting in a meadow, as if life was one long round of gallantry and *panache*. Alas for them ! *Cur mundus militat sub vana gloria* ?

But those slaughtered paladins are for our betters. They will make to groan the tables of the Ritz and the Carlton. We here shall eat our pigs, literally from head to feet, *intus et in cute*. And for our drink, it will be mead. Metheglin, if you will have it: I prefer the monosyllable. It is a noble liquor, but asks, even demands, moderation. Personally, I take it in a liqueur glass, like cherry brandy,

which, however, it does not at all resemble. There is nothing sweet about good mead ; nothing sticky or viscid. It is a thin, clear, amber-coloured bever, slightly aromatic, very insidious, ruthless to those who exceed. And to explain how ruthless, to what exceeding bitter end, I cannot do better than wind up my essay with the story of Farmer Hackbush, Farmer Norton, and Farmer Gell, who met at the house of a friend on the border of this shire last Boxing Day, and revelled, not wisely, upon mead. They revelled long and deeply, until they were conveyed somehow to the station and heaved into the milk-train of the small hours, consigned to the guard ; all for the same destination, and, as it turned out, destiny. For at their wayside station, where they were duly heaved out into the breathless, dewy dark—that intense dark of the hours before dawn—they were convoyed into the yard to the three tax-carts and slumbering boys which awaited them. They were heaved in—Farmer Hackbush, Farmer Norton, Farmer Gell ; mechanically they took and shook the reins, and murmured Cooorroop ! And each of them, thanks to a sober, instructed cob, reached a house, an open front-door, and an awaiting matron in a dressing-gown. But none reached his own front door. For Farmer Hackbush was heaved into the front door and arms of Mrs. Gell, and Farmer Gell into those of Mrs. Norton, and Farmer Norton into those of Mrs. Hackbush. All at 5 a.m. And what happened next, in each or any case, I don't know.

## *Teufelsdröckh in Hexameters*

ONE must not, said Socrates (or Plato for him) lay hands upon one's father; nor must I, although he is in no such relationship to me either through nature or grace, write otherwise of my friend Mr. Gosse than with the respect and gratitude for many a fruitful hour which he has earned. I am too much in his debt (to carry it no further back) for his *Causeries du dimanche*, since collected under the equally happy title of *Books on the Table*, to avoid saying so whenever I have the chance. He is doing what, I suppose, no writer now in Britain could do so well, if at all, when week after week he delivers a ripe and reasoned judgement upon any literary matter of interest which time and chance may throw up to him. It is not only a triumph of range, though his range is astonishing; nor only a matter of length, though he keeps that excellently well; nor of lightness of touch; nor of a needle's point upon the exact place of attack. He has all that, and a great deal more—mastery, ease, and urbanity; remoteness from the market-square and dust of the bookstalls. It is, in fact, the case of a man who has found the thing to do which exactly suits his present temper, and can do it so as exactly to fit the present need. The judgements of such an one are not lightly to be questioned by the half-generation below him, and certainly not by me.

He won't misunderstand me, then, when I say that one of his *Causeries* sent me back to A. H. Clough, to re-read his poetic remains from cover to cover, and then—it sounds ungrateful—to question a phrase or two which he lets fall

in disparagement of the poet. Admitting, as he does, that Clough is 'still remembered, and in no danger of being forgotten', he goes on to say that 'he is remembered by his poems, which, although they are amateurish in form and dry in texture, have an element of faint perennial interest.' It is delicately said; yet is it true? Mr. Gosse goes on to contradict it almost immediately, and to show that where the first part of the judgement is true, the second is not, that where the first part is untrue, so again is the second; for, as he puts it, 'when the body of his verse has been winnowed, not much remains, but there is a handful of golden grains, and they are pure wheat'. In other words, that part of Clough's poetry which is amateurish in form and dry in texture has neither faint perennial interest, nor any interest now at all; but the other part, the handful of pure corn which results from your winnowing, is neither amateurish nor dry, and possesses, for those who tackle it fairly, a very strong interest even now. So far as I can see, so far as Mr. Gosse will take me, that winnowed golden remnant of Clough is *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich*. In form that poem is a rough mock-epic written in hexameters which, if they clatter and rattle, do their job of stiffening by burlesque homeric the sentimental fibre of the thing. In substance *The Bothie* is a fervent, even impassioned piece of work whose inspiration, as I think, can be dated with ease, but whose passion is as old as mankind. It is rather remarkable that both Mr. Gosse and the author of his Book on the Table (*Arthur Hugh Clough*, by James Insley Osborne) should have missed the well-spring of such a poem.

It is important to remember the date of *The Bothie*, on every account. It is 1848. Well, in 1847 Clough had

been tutor to a reading-party in the Highlands which 'settled down', says Mr. Osborne, 'for some weeks in a large farm-house', at Drumnadrochit. When the party broke up, Clough and a friend made a walking-tour through the Western Highlands, stopping at, among other places, a forester's hut called Toper-na-Fuosich, stopping at an inn at Rannoch, and attending a ball at Glenfinnan given by a chieftain called MacDonald of Glenaladale. 'Some of the incidents of *The Bothie*, according to Shairp, happened to them' while they were on tour. One of my points here is that they certainly did, and in order to make it I have only to cite a fragmentary and undated poem, entitled  $\delta\theta\epsilon\delta\varsigma\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\sigma\hat{\nu}$ :

Farewell, my Highland lassie! when the year returns around,  
Be it Greece, or be it Norway, where my vagrant feet are  
found,

I shall call to mind the place, I shall call to mind the day,  
The day that's gone for ever, and the glen that's far away;

I shall see thy soft brown eyes dilate to wakening woman-thought,

And whiter still the white cheek grow to which the blush  
was brought;

I shall hear, and see, and feel, in sequence sadly true,  
Shall repeat the bitter-sweet of the lingering last adieu;  
I shall seem as now to leave thee, with the kiss upon the  
brow,

And the fervent benediction of— $\delta\theta\epsilon\delta\varsigma\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\sigma\hat{\nu}$ !

Mr. Gosse refers to that poem, to its warmth and depth of regret, but does not apparently see how it bears upon *The Bothie*. He thinks it was cast aside for the longer poem. I don't think that myself, but rather that the longer

poem grew out of the lyric by the need Clough felt both to relate and to justify a real experience. In other words, Elspie of *The Bothie* lived; Clough had loved her. Yes, but there is more in it than that. Let me return to the date. *The Bothie* was written and published in 1848. That was a year of revolution in Europe, with every prospect of being so in England. It was the year of Feargus O'Connor and the great Chartist petition. It was three years after Disraeli's *Sybil*, one year before *Alton Locke* and *Yeast*. It was two years before Carlyle broke out with *Latter-Day Pamphlets* and had everybody by the ears. The year, in fact, was that one in which the cynic's influence on Clough was strongest. If Clough fell in love with a peasant-girl in 1847 and wrote his best poem in 1848, it is no wonder that it was *The Bothie*. The hexameters may be due to Longfellow, but the clatter of them is not. The clatter and the burlesque homeric are Clough of Rugby and Oxford trying to cover up his tracks. And his tracks are the tracks of Teufelsdröckh. That, shortly, is the rationale of *The Bothie*.

Carlyle seems really to have liked Clough. When news of his death in 1861 was sent him by Froude he replied with less depreciation than usual, 'I quite agree in what you say of poor Clough. A man more vivid, ingenious, veracious, mildly radiant, I have seldom met with, and in a character so honest, modest, kindly.' You can generally trust Carlyle for adjectives; but those are odd ones. *The Bothie* is all those things to this day, getting on for eighty years old though it be—but it is much more. There is passion in it, both moral and physical, which is not smothered in irony; which smoulders under its ironical garment, burns holes in the airy thing and betrays glowing

flesh beneath. Carlyle dealt very warily with passion (though bile always had him at its mercy), and Clough never let himself go like that elsewhere : in *The Bothie*, however, the matter of experience, of the thing felt, is not to be mistaken. The justification too is equally passionate ; and whether it is a case of imagination flaming out of doctrine or of doctrine kindled and illuminated by sensation does not seem to matter very much. Both are there and both felt.

Mr. Osborne calls *The Bothie* a novel in verse. He can only maintain that by doing violence to novels in general and the poem in particular. A novel, if it is anything, is a reduction of life to the terms of art; *The Bothie* is a dramatic piece of special pleading. It has a thesis, a *scène à faire*. It does not proceed from observation of life or of a segment of life : rather, observation (and there is plenty) is used to quicken the plea. Certainly there is a narrative ; but it is used in the epic manner, that is, it depends upon character more than plot, and is told less by action than by oration, both direct and oblique. Story, as such, there is next to none. An Oxford reading-party in the Highlands is discovered, dressing for the yearly dinner of chieftains and clansmen which celebrates the yearly games. The young men and their tutor are touched off with a spirit which rarely deserts the poem. They have no other bearing upon the plot than that of throwing it up, and at the end all disappear, except the tutor. He is 'the grave man, nicknamed Adam',

White-tied, clerical, silent, with antique square-cut  
waistcoat,

and almost certainly a portrait.

Then the hero—‘ Philip Hewson, a poet’,  
Hewson, a radical hot, hating lords and scorning ladies,  
Silent mostly, but often reviling in fire and fury  
Feudal tenures, mercantile lords, competition and bishops,  
—a very jolly collection of hate-stuff. Mr. Gosse thinks  
Clough intended Hewson for himself, and could no doubt  
justify his opinion. There seems to me a good deal of  
1848 in the young man as he is developed—*Tear’em*  
Roebuck, the Corn-Law Rhymer, not forgetting by any  
means Thomas Carlyle. For Hewson, it is to be observed,  
had nothing of the aristocrat about his origin. What he  
says of his youth and people sounds a good deal more  
like Manchester. The ‘foils’, on the other hand, are  
high: Hope,

... black-tied, white-waistcoated, simple, His Honour—  
heir to ‘the earldom of Illy’; Lindsay,

... the lively, cheery, cigar-loving Lindsay;

Hobbes,

... the great Hobbes, contemplative, corpulent, witty,  
Author forgotten and silent of currentest phrases and  
fancies,  
Mute and exuberant by turns;

lastly, Airlie,

... effulgent as God of Olympus;  
Blue, perceptibly blue, was the coat that had white-silk  
facings,  
Waistcoat blue, coral-buttoned, the white tie finely adjusted  
—such are of the reading-party, and such Clough’s pseudo-  
homeric, of which Matthew Arnold went so far as to  
say that in two things they were more like the *Iliad* than

any other English poem he could call to mind—‘in the rapidity of movement, and the plainness and directness of its style’. He says of *The Bothie* too that it produces in the reader the sense which Homer also produces—‘the sense of having, within short limits of time, a large portion of human life presented to him, instead of a small portion’. That is to say that it has universality, and to say the truth.

At the dinner, which is told with a gusto, the result of experience, Philip makes a pragmatical speech, remembering Bannockburn but working in also Culloden, which, while not followed by the ‘gentrice’, commends itself and its speaker to one in the company,

. . . a thin man clad as the Saxon,  
Trouser and cap and jacket of homespun blue, hand-woven,  
who at the close

. . . said with determined accent to Hewson,  
Touching his arm: Young man, if ye pass through the  
braes of Lochaber,  
See by the loch-side ye come to the Bothie of Tober-na-  
Vuolich.

That thin man is the blacksmith Mackaye, father of the heroine. The whole of the first stave is machinery, of a sort familiar to readers of Tennyson. *The Princess* has such an opening—but I consider Clough’s the better, because broader, brushwork. As for *The Gardener’s Daughter*—but a word of her presently.

The second stave gives the theme, in an outburst of Philip’s at breakfast, when, discussing the dance which had followed the dinner, and the ‘noble ladies and rustic girls, their partners’, the poet and radical declared himself

Sick of the very names of your Lady Augustas and Floras ;  
and in right Carlylese cried out,

Oh, if our high-born girls knew only the grace, the  
attraction

Labour, and labour alone, can add to the beauty of women,  
and much more to the same effect. He caps all with an  
experience (obviously an experience of Clough's the year  
before) which plays in *The Bothie* the precise part occupied  
by George Fox's leather suit in the philosophy of Teu-  
felsdröckh :

One day sauntering ' long and listless ', as Tennyson has it,  
Long and listless strolling, ungainly in hobbadihoyhood,  
Chanced it my eye fell aside on a capless, bonnetless maiden,  
Bending with three-pronged fork in a garden uprooting  
potatoes.

A thing seen. But now—

Was it the air? who can say? or herself, or the charm  
of the labour?

But a new thing was in me; and longing delicious  
possessed me,  
Longing to take her and lift her, and put her away from  
her slaving.

Was it embracing or aiding was most in my mind? hard  
question!

But a new thing was in me; I, too, was a youth among  
maidens:

Was it the air? who can say? but in part 'twas the charm  
of the labour.

Of that one can only say, a thing felt. It is, however,  
pure Carlyle. Hear Teufelsdröckh :

' Two men I honour, and no third. First the toil-  
worn craftsman that with earth-made implement labori-  
ously conquers the earth, and makes her man's. Venerable

to me is the hard Hand; crooked, coarse; wherein notwithstanding lies a cunning virtue, indefeasibly royal, as of the Sceptre of this Planet. . . . For us was thy back so bent, for us were thy straight limbs and fingers so deformed: thou wert our Conscript, on whom the lot fell, and fighting our battles wert so marred. . . .

Illuminate that by sex-instinct, and you light the fire which we call passion. The reasoning is the same, though it is transfigured.

The rest of the poem sticks closely to the theme. Philip goes to another dance, at Rannoch, and finds a ‘golden-haired Katie’ with whom he builds peat-stacks, lights kitchen fires, does odd chores; whom he kisses, and presently leaves. Why so? He tells his tutor in a letter:

What had ended it all, he said, was singular, very—  
 I was walking along some two miles off from the cottage  
 Full of my dreamings—a girl went by in a party with  
 others;  
 She had a cloak on, was stepping on quickly, for rain was  
 beginning;  
 But as she passed, from her hood I saw her eyes look at me.  
 So quick a glance, so regardless I, that although I had  
 felt it,  
 You couldn’t properly say our eyes met.

But they had, though; and it was doom. He left his Katie, no longer his, for she consoled herself with Airlie—Airlie of the waistcoat—and was next heard of  
 Dancing at Balloch, you say, in the Castle, with Lady Maria!

That was what the tutor was told; and that leads us to Book VI, to the Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich, to the

tutor himself, to David Mackaye the blacksmith, to Philip and to Elspie—to her ‘whose glance at Rannoch

Turned me in that mysterious way; yes, angels conspiring,  
Slowly drew me, conducted me, home, to herself. . . .’

The rest of the poem is concerned with the wooing of Elspeth, and philosophical justification of the stoop on Philip’s part, if stoop there were. It is gravely but ardently told with a studied coolness and leisureliness which cannot hide the fervour. Indeed, the poem trembles with it, very much as *The Angel in the House* also trembles. Elspeth is shown as a girl of character as well as sweetness. There is nothing of the valentine sugariness of *The Gardener’s Daughter*, and none of the mere spilth and fume of calf-love.

Ah, one rose,  
One rose, but one, by those fair fingers cull’d,  
Were worth a hundred kisses press’d on lips  
Less exquisite than thine.

We are lucky to be let off with a hundred. When Tennyson was in that mood it was generally a million. That sort of thing is as false as foolish, as sickly as both; but the love-making in *The Bothie* is a manly, a womanly, affair, gravely told, yet with a latent heat which is justified less by the philosophy of Carlyle than by that of the Creator. Male and female created He them.

But if, as I feel sure, the Carlylean philosophy was Clough’s second-string, you will find it sure enough in Book IX, where Philip, in soliloquy, solemnly renounces his Lady Maria:

Ah, fair Lady Maria, God meant you to live and be  
lovely;  
Be so then, and I bless you. . . .

That is magnanimous at least ; but here is the Teufels-dröckh vein :

But ye, ye spurious ware, who  
Might be plain women, and can be by no possibility  
better !

—Ye unhappy statuettes, and miserable trinkets,  
Poor alabaster chimney-piece ornaments under glass  
cases—

Bless me, my mother had them !

Come, in God's name, come down ! the very French  
clock by you

Puts you to shame with ticking ; the fire-irons deride  
you.

You, young girl, who have had such advantages,  
learnt so quickly,

Can you not teach ? O yes, and she likes Sunday-  
school extremely,

Only it's too soon in the morning. Away ! if to  
teach be your calling,

It is no play, but a business : off, go teach and be  
paid for it.

That is right Carlyle ; and this is the end :

They are married and gone to New Zealand.  
Five hundred pounds in pocket, with books, and two  
or three pictures,

Tool-box, plough, and the rest, they rounded the  
sphere to New Zealand.

There he hewed, and dug ; subdued the earth and his  
spirit ;

There he built him a home ; there Elspie bare him his  
children,

There hath he farmstead and land, and fields of corn  
and flax fields ;

And the Antipodes too have a Bothie of Tober-na-  
Vuolich.

The interest of that is not faint. I don't recall, I don't think there exists, a more poetical rendering of what was true in Carlyle's moral teaching. So he taught in his first book, which contains, it is not too much to say, the whole of his message to his fellow-creatures. How extremely pertinent it is to the times in which we now find ourselves I need not add. What was pious opinion, counsel of perfection, in 1848 seems plain commonsense after 1914—but I need not go into that. What I should like to point out in closing is that Carlyle's gospel hit other poets besides Clough and moved them to utterance. It moved Tennyson, Patmore, and Kingsley. There is, however, this plain difference between the romantic and the sentimental, that the one breathes the air of which it sings, and the other thinks, still more talks, about breathing it. Compare *The Bothie* with *The Gardener's Daughter*, *The Lord of Burleigh* and what not, and you will see. Clough, as I have said, breathed in 1848 the air of Teufelsdröckh's Everlasting Yea, and transfigured it. He translated it, if you will, imported sex into it. That was natural and very necessary, since we can't get on without sex. Carlyle had forgotten it.

## *'The Lave o't'*

I OBSERVE that a philanthropist announces the publication of a work of good intent upon 'How to be happy and useful from sixty to ninety'. Sixty is, I confess, a matter of momentary interest to me, but I am shrewdly of opinion that the best possible way of being both happy and useful at ninety, for ninety people out of a hundred, is not to 'be' at all if you can honourably avoid it. At sixty you might publish an Epic Poem in a number of books, as Milton, I think, did. At seventy you might be Prime Minister, as Lord Balfour may perhaps be once more, or be made a Knight of the Garter, as he actually is. At eighty you might be elected a British Academician, or even a Royal Academician; or you might marry, as did King Tom of Norfolk, and beget the first of six children, as indeed did he. At eighty-five you might find yourself farming fifteen hundred acres of land, which is the occupation of a friend of mine at this moment. At eighty-nine you might be gardener to a clergyman, with every prospect of still being so at ninety. That is the assured position of another acquaintance of mine, one of the ten in the hundred whom I carefully provided for. For him, and for the like of Mr. Frederic Harrison, the 'lave' of this our life may be regarded as a good and thriving concern. So that you have something to hope for, there is always a 'lave o't'. I remember a good tale of Stevenson's about that, of a very old sexton lying on his death-bed. 'Doctor,' said he, 'I hae laid three hunner and fower-score in that kirkyaird; an it had been His wull I would hae likit weel to hae made

out the fower hunner.’ A hope so pious and so reasonable may stand for as good a ‘lave o’t’ as that other very natural wish of the nonagenarian, to see his century through. In many of them the desire is strong enough to get itself gratified. But when it comes to beginning another the heart seems to fail them. There is too much ‘lave’ to it. They go very soon.

When you are hemmed in by circumstances so that you can hardly turn about, it is astonishing and comfortable to know how little ‘lave’ you can do with. I know a man whose years are fewer than mine, but whom a mortal disease has turned handsomely my elder. Some desperate fault in the heart’s action incapacitates him from the slightest exertion, and threatens him from hour to hour. He never knows, when he lies down in his bed, whether he will see the light of another day. He has no people of his own, lives by himself, with what zest for the dreary performance I can only guess. Yet there’s a ‘lave o’t’ for that patient, stricken man—in his garden. He has a garth before his door, perhaps six yards square, in which certain shrubs, bulbs, primrose roots, and lily-clumps periodically undergo their miracle of resurrection and transfiguration. They have always been his sundial: many of their epiphanies go back to the days when he was in full vigour and at work, and had a good wife beside him. *Nessun maggior dolore*, you think? Not so. He lives for those yearly wonders now, and lives upon them too, from season to season. I went by the other day, and saw him as near ‘whistlin’ o’er the lave o’t’ as a man mortally hurt may do. He was pondering his Mezereon bush, then all one flush of rose-colour. ‘A fine sight,’ I said, as indeed it was. ‘Yes, sir,’ he said; and presently added, ‘And what I look at is—I’ve seen it

again.' That was his *Nunc Dimittis* for the day; but that was a month ago. By this time his guelder rose will be promising; then it will be his Weigela. Pippins and cheese to come! There always are.

And yet once more, there used to be a child of nature in my village who went by the name of Happy. Life, which he appeared to despise, which in his person he certainly neglected, was nevertheless full of 'the lave o't'. His hair, which he never cut, hung over his shoulders, like a fakir's; his beard swept his breast. It was a good thing that it did, since without it, wearing no shirt, he would have looked too décolleté for modern squeamishness. As it was, he was so remarkably sketchy elsewhere that he would have needed a beard as long as that Kaiser's of Heine, sleeping under the hill, to make him presentable. Failing that, women used to turn and run when they saw him on the road. He utterly refused to do any sort of work, and lived, so far as I know, on roots. He had a shack over his head, inherited from an old mother, but no furniture at all. He neither cleaned nor repaired it; so by and by it fell in, and another house sheltered him, which is known as *the House*. When the sun was out that man used to sing like a thrush in a lilac-bush. One could hear him, as Davidson used to hear the larks, 'shouting in the lift'—not, I ought to explain, that cage of ascension which you have in London, but the 'luft'—in fact, the blue sky. And Happy, in the House, still justifies his name. He has been barbered and clothed; he does not now disdain a turn of work. But the 'lave o't' is still his. He doesn't whistle o'er it, however. He sings—shouts, whenever he sees the sun. An odd fish, but very human, I think.

## *Alter Egos*

SOME men write better as somebody else, some write worse; but every writer loves playing at life, so the practice has grown. A contemporary of mine, who does it himself, thinks it should be checked, like the population (according to some philosophers); and all there is to say to him is, Well, check it—or even, if one dared make so free, *chuck* it. One knows, of course, what he means. An artificial style certainly argues an arbitrary standpoint. You desire to know a writer's personal opinion, and how are you to have it if you detect him taking a view of the terrain on stilts, or in high-heeled shoes, or in red-heeled shoes? Or, if a man otherwise respectable assumes the cap and bells before sitting down at his desk, or betrays in his essay the consciousness that he has had a perfumed bath and put on his best coat as a preliminary to it, will any pleasure you may have in the performance prevent your thinking him a coxcomb?

It is perhaps obvious that an elaborate writer, or even a remarkable writer, will be as exceedingly hated by some as loved by others; and which he will be depends upon the synthesis made of his book between writer and reader—whether his nonsense suits your nonsense. But if there should grow the least doubt in the reader's mind who in particular it is that he is taking to his bosom, he will suffer an immediate chill, which may prove mortal to the book. Now, while an acquaintance with Lamb's Letters will make it impossible to doubt that he and Elia were one person,

and which person they were, it is not so easy to be sure of Sterne and his Yorick. When Lamb sheltered behind Elia, with submission to Mr. Lucas, he 'adopted a dramatic standpoint' only so far as a name in the bills could be called a standpoint. He projected himself into his stalking-horse, he took the name but not the thing. Elia was literally a mask. Dead or alive, Lamb shot at his familiars behind him, as Teukros in the *Iliad* sheltered behind the shield of Aias. Elia was a man of straw. If anybody doubts it let him read 'Character of the Late Elia', done by a pen which never shirked a fact, gloried rather in making it a little sharper than the truth. It is the best character-study of Lamb ever made by any one, and ought to settle it.

But Yorick ! That 'fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy' ! There was a character for Sterne to step into, to realize, to reincarnate, and, in time to inhabit. Not ready-made, of course, for you and me, with Hamlet's tender recollections to go upon, and no more ; but for a man of Sterne's sensibility and vanity the material was irresistible. A witty fellow, beloved of a prince ; a fellow to be wept over, lamented by the great. I don't see how he could have needed more than that. It was a case of 'John's John', according to Wendell Holmes's analysis of man. Into Yorick's shell Sterne cast all that he would fain have believed himself to be, possibly did believe himself to be. Within it, also, he felt it safe to be what he really was, a creature of which, except so graced, the public must never be aware. His success may be gauged by the concluding volume of the *Sentimental Journey*, done by another hand, a disgusting parody indeed. What sort of a creature, in fact, he was, letters to his private friends occasionally

exhibit—that one, for instance, in schoolboy Latin : ‘Nescio quid est materia cum me, sed sum fatigatus et aegrotus de meâ uxore plus quam unquam.’ That is Sterne, not Yorick. Sterne was tusked.

But Yorick went into Sterne’s pulpit, and nodded and winked, smirked and grimaced, wept and blubbered there. His sermons were actually published as ‘by Mr. Yorick’. I would not myself go so far as Gray did in criticism of them. It was never Sterne’s way to play monkey-tricks ; rather, to suggest them. It was incumbent upon him to assure you that he knew what was what better than most people. So much he certainly did in his most famous sermon upon the Levite, which contains an apology for frailty exactly to be matched in the *Sentimental Journey*. But he could be more decorous when he pleased ; and when it came to a Charity Sermon which was inscribed to the Dean of York, he threw off his *alter ego* altogether, and wrote the respectful epistle dedicatory of the ordinary obsequious clergyman of his day. Take his extant letters as a whole, they are six of one and half a dozen of the other. To women he was mainly Yorick. In those to his daughter Lydia he is at his best.

It was not so much that Sterne was a bad man : I dare-say he was no worse than the common run. That which disturbs us in the midst of his April-writing, of his quick alternations of the tragic and the comic mask, is that, in the person of Yorick, he allows himself to be judged for a much better fellow than he was. Many a man had a lewd side to him : his master, Rabelais, had ; Shakespeare had, the master of most. Swift loved scullduggery and cared not who knew it. But we are for ever to exonerate Yorick if Sterne is to succeed ; and if we cannot, or will not, it is

not to be Sterne's fault, but Yorick's. Here, then, is an *alter ego* which is much more than a stalking-horse. Here is an alias.

When the Press absorbed the Essay, as it did after Cowley's day,—that is, as soon as it became a necessity of the breakfast-table, anonymity tempted men to be other than themselves. They swelled into the editorial 'We' or out of mere self-respect thought it proper to be Mr. Bickerstaffe or Mr. Spectator. Perhaps it was discretion in Addison which drove him to hide in the shortfaced haunter of the coffee-houses ; but he soon read himself into the part, became a recognizable human creature to his readers, and has become so much so for posterity that three-quarters of the moderns who think of him at all think of him so. But there was no duplicity there. The air of detachment and good-humoured observation, which was the utmost liberty he took with himself, sat well upon him. Nobody could mistake him for other than a gentleman ; nobody desired to measure his face. In reading Yorick you do want to examine Sterne's bumps. There should surely be callosities on the brows. And are not those ears curiously pointed ?

## *A Fair-weather Apologue*

PEOPLE sometimes ask me what we talk about in the country, and I reply, The weather, meaning, of course, the sun. When they raise their eyebrows, as ever so slightly they always do, I inquire, as the Zoroastrian did, ‘Have you ever seen it?’ Without having seen it, it is impossible to understand what a profound bearing it has upon life and conversation: I don’t mean mere talk, but real conversation—as when we say piously that our conversation is in Heaven, where no doubt it should be. You may love rain, as I do myself; you may love the West wind; but you don’t love the sun—you worship it.

It is early morning yet, but already He is over the hill. I set my windows wide; the light pours in and floods the room; ashamed, the fire goes out. There’s no doubt about it: ‘the hounds of spring are on winter’s traces’. The whole valley is alive: it is like the scene on Brother’s Water. The stream doth glitter, the small birds twitter, the green field sleeps—No! there we part company with Wordsworth. The meadow across the river, though deeply green, cannot be said to sleep in the sun. It is criss-crossed all over with runnels of racing blue water. Insatiable ducks are wading in them, gobbling as they wade—gobbling *what* I have no notion, but possibly mud. ‘Forty feeding like one’!—the wonder-working line holds good, at any rate. Such a scene as that, on the threshold of day, invokes happiness; and would invoke contentment too, if one weren’t too happy to be contented.

There's the difference, or at least a difference, between those two. One is a state of mind, the other a non-state, an eclipse of it. A picture of content is before me at this moment, namely an Aylesbury duck excessively white on a green bank, its head flatlings, half-hidden in its long back ; one beady eye open, but entirely vacant, one red leg upholding its bulk. If that is not contentment, I don't know the state. The bird is full to the gullet, the biliary ducts are in running order, Nature the leech is at her task, and the patient is asleep. Whereas happiness—ah, you should have seen the cock-thrush which a minute ago lit upon the garden wall, his beak full of feathers, his mind of affairs. Pippins and cheese to come : that's happiness. Here the Great Affair was in process of becoming ; the heart was inditing a good matter. He was too happy to be frightened of me ; just showed me what he had found, gave me a hint of what was toward, and away. 'Virgil', says Bacon, 'did excellently and profoundly couple the knowledge of causes and conquest of fears together as *concomitantia*.

Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas  
Quique metus omnes et inexorabile fatum  
Subiecit pedibus . . .'

Queer state of the world, when happiness lay in mere security ! With the cock-thrush, as with me, happiness lies rather in having things to do.

Man never is, but always to be blest. That is not quite right. Man is blest when he reasonably believes that he is to be so. He is capable of high happiness if he is not only contented, but hopeful of still more to come. We live indeed from hour to hour, but more in to-morrow than to-day. So the Laureate, when he praises

The idle life I lead,

and goes on to report that

every eve I say  
Noting my step in bliss,  
That I have known no day  
In all my life like this,

must be called happy if he has even a moderate certainty that his ‘pleasant sleep’ will continue. It is by faith, they say, that we dare put out one foot before another, or rear our bulk upright upon the two leather-shod wedges which Mr. Beerbohm has compared to glazed ox-tongues. It may be true. Anyhow, it is by hope that we go happily to bed, commit ourselves to forgetfulness and the flood of dark. Hope is a thing which the sanguine only have by nature. Others must toil after it. A virtue indeed it is. Shelley had it, and lifted from the trough of wave after wave of adversity. Byron had it not, and tried to cover his despair in sardonic laughter. Gray never had it either ; but Gray was a stoic, not a cynic, and very tender of other men’s happiness. No one has written wiselier of it than he who could not attain it.

I have been reading his Letters again lately, very nearly the best in our language, but not those of a happy man.. Those, rather, of a man shrugging his shoulders at himself. His besetting trouble, he said, was ‘a white Melancholy, or rather Leucocholy’, which never suffered him to attain to joy or pleasure, ‘yet is a good easy sort of a state’. Gallantly borne, with a grin. ‘The only fault of it is insipidity.’ Yet nobody knew better than he what was wanting. ‘The whole matter’ of happiness, he said, ‘is to have always something going forward.’ That is what the cock-thrush told me this morning ; what the stirring water-meadow was saying. ‘Happy they who can create

a rose-tree, or erect a honeysuckle, that can watch the brood of a hen, or see a fleet of their own ducklings launch into the water.' *Felix qui potuit, indeed!* Gray knew better. There was never enough going forward in his cloistered life: Stoke to Cambridge, Cambridge to Stoke, like a rat in two cages. And yet, a little before he wrote that very letter to his friend Wharton, he had had a picture of the thing before him, roses and all—and shied at it! That I don't understand.

It was after he had allowed Horace Walpole to print and publish '*The Bard*' and the rest of his sublimities of the sort that he received an anonymous criticism directed to '*The Reverend Mr. Gray*' at Strawberry Hill which excited him not a little. It was nine pages long, expressed with freedom—he says that the writer was 'very frank and indeed much ruder than he meant to be'—and concluded with a hint that if the poet wanted more of that kind of thing he could get it by writing to the Postmaster at Andover. Gray, who, like all poets, would rather be criticized with freedom than not criticized at all, promptly wrote. The result was this, in a letter to Mason:

'I wrote to the man (as you bid me) and had a second criticism; his name (for I desired to know it) is Butler. He is (he says) of the number of those who live less contented than they ought, in an independent indolence, can just afford himself a horse for airings about Harewood Forest, half a score new books in the season, and good part of half an acre of garden ground for honeysuckle and roses.'

What else could he want, or anybody want? Contented he may not have been; happy I must believe him. Contentment is not an essential of the higher state: you may be

happier in discontent, provided that you hope to be contented 'in a minute'. But it seems to me that Butler of Andover had more of the *concomitantia* of happiness than Virgil's lucky dog. Those plainly are, that there must be something going forward; that you must be doing it yourself; that you must not have too much of it; that you must not have as much as you want of it; that you must think it the only thing worth doing. All those *desideranda* were within the grasp of Butler, and if insipidity had not turned them sour for poor Gray before his curiosity had got to work upon them, I don't know why he did not pursue the acquaintance; but I know that he did not. When he was at Southampton in 1764, thinking 'to see Salisbury and to be sure Wilton and Amesbury and Stonehenge', he adds the peremptory sentence, 'Say not a word of Andover'. Had the happy solitary made too free? Or was he too happy for Gray's contemplation? I don't know the answer to these questions, and they don't matter much. If Gray could not help himself, Butler of Andover could not have helped him. Yet consider how Gray must have helped Butler of Andover.

## *Wind in the Downs*

THE Avon Valley is handsomely a fortnight ahead of mine, as I have proved over and over again, but from what I saw to-day I should suppose that the Wlye ran through a warmer soil than any other of the Five Rivers. I saw a tree just outside Wilton covered with golden knobs on the point of breaking—and that in a wind which made my heart feel like doing the same thing. I dare swear that in Lord Pembroke's park there will be several in full leaf. Avon will not provide such a sight yet awhile ; and Ebble not for three weeks. You get in this country of ridge and hollow something approaching the sharp contrasts the South of France will give you—something approaching them, and yet, of course, if I can be understood, nothing like them. I remember driving from Le Puy to Pont Saint-Esprit—May the season. Le Puy had been hot enough for any one ; May weather intensified by the crater in which the town cowers and the tufa on which it roasts. From there, and from May, we climbed into March and fields of daffodil ; from March into as bleak a February as you could dread in the Jura, and snow over all the waste ; from that, down a mountain slide, into the valley of the Ardèche, where the hedgerows were full of dusty roses, and the peasants making hay. You won't do that in South Wilts., but you may have the Chalke valley with its trees naked and sere, and the slopes of its hills white with winter bents, and over the plain come down into Wilton to find magnolias in flower, and house fronts smothered in Forsythia. Ours is the snuggest valley but poorest soil

of any of the five, and our river, being the smallest, has not thrown up a broad bed of silt on either bank in which trees can grow tall and feel running water about their roots.

When our Mistral began to blow, which was ten days ago, I went up the drove immediately behind my house, and could hardly find a sign of a cowslip. I did find the leaves of one, but there were no more on a ledge which will be thick with them by and by. No wheatears to be seen, and no March hares in their amorous transports. The grass was as harsh as wire, the moss, disintegrated by the rain and dried by the wind, stood away from the earth like the ribs of a rotten ship. To come presently upon a little cloud of dog-violets was to be moved, as the Ancient Mariner was, by 'a spring of love'. Having blessed them unaware, I did it again, very conscious of the act of worship. Beyond that, further up the hill, one might have been in mid-winter. I struggled to the Race Plain where the wind, straight from Nova Zembla, cut through my clothes like a knife. As usual, I encountered a little scattered fleet of gypsies, tacking into the jaws of it; a sorry nag straining at a cart full of poles and miscellaneous junk; women and young girls encumbered with babies in their shawls, barefoot children padding about on their white heels, and one smooth secret-faced man, lord of the tattered seraglio, himself well-clothed and unhampered. The women were too distressed even to look their usual petitions. I think they felt the wind rattling their bones together. But the sultan hailed me, and we conversed for a few moments behind a furze-bush. They were from Sherborne, going to the Forest, into what he called 'summer quarters'. 'They will be glad of them,

some of your ladies,' I said, and he gave me a sharp look. 'They are all right,' he said. 'They'll have to wait, like the best of us.' He accepted a fill of his pipe, lit it, turned it downwards, nodded, plunged his hands, and went leisurely after his belongings. Myself, I went huddling home to a wood fire, feeling that he had the better of me in a many ways. For one thing, he kept half a dozen women in order—which I could not do even if I would ; for another, he did not allow the mere wind to interfere with his good pleasure, his lordly ease of mind. I admire, while I cannot esteem, gypsies. Their ways are not our ways.

The Race Plain is their highway from the West to their headquarters in the New Forest, as once it was ours to London. Nearly every furze-clump all its length has the lewside blackened by the ruins of a fire. Night or day you will meet them coming or going, or pass a group of them snuggling or sleeping by a drift-wood fire. Very rarely they come to beg or hawk clothes-pegs in the village ; but mostly they keep to their green road. Great poachers, of course ; but beyond a few stray fowls we don't hear of much thieving. It is strange how little they mix, even now, with our people, not strange, therefore, that we know so little of them. That mystery is occasionally the begetter of romance. I said somewhere, confirming Borrow, that their girls scorn our young men, and am sure it is true of the main of them. Yet there are half-breeds among them, plainly ; and such generalizations cannot be quite true. I heard of a case only the other day, where some green-eyed waif of theirs cast her spells upon a farm-lad, bewitched and bemused him until, for love of her, he was led into bad courses. He used to meet her at night, and

their shelter in bad weather was a deserted barn in the hill-side, a place locally known as Rats' Castle. From such association he was led on and on, left his home, threw up his work, and hid with her in the hollows of the hills. His people thought he had gone for a soldier, and made no more than perfunctory search. Then, by and by, things began to be missed—hens and their eggs, bread out of bakers' carts, milk out of dairies, even clothing from the washing-lines. And then, one fine night, Rats' Castle was discovered to be ablaze. The lad was taken and confessed to everything, but the girl was not found. I hope he got over his heart-attack during his term at Devizes, which he served alone. He exonerated her from all blame, took everything on his shoulders ; and as he was found near the burning barn, and she not seen there, there was no evidence against her, though plenty of suspicion. He would not, perhaps could not, name her, but she was well known to the police, and has since been seen at fairs, or in the market. She was pointed out to me in Sarum one Tuesday—quite young, with hair lighter than her tan, with narrowed, sidelong eyes, in a faded red blouse and black skirt. She stood motionless, biting a corner of her apron between her very white teeth—half vicious, half wild-cat. Then I was told the story, and was much moved to think of what never did, and in the nature of things, or of boy, never could have come out at the inquiry : any hint, namely, of the wild stress of passion, the lure of the romantic, or of what answers to it, which drew the devoted simpleton to forsake father and mother, industry and honesty, and to cleave to this *belle dame sans merci*, to thieve for her, and to take all the penalty. That is what he did ; and he was not the first.

## *Beginnings*

POETRY, which is so much older than the printing-press as to be older than writing, still preserves as habit what it once employed as machinery. Rime was a machine, the stanza a machine, rhythm itself, and certainly the exordium. It was found necessary to begin with the bill of fare. When prose, from being oratory, became literature, another necessity was felt—that you must begin at the beginning, that is to say, with the soup. The two were used alternatively or, as we shall see, compounded, presented together; but it was reserved to days comparatively recent to introduce the *apéritif*.

To serve our own times I must vary the figure. As you look upon your novel—for what is left to literature now besides the novel?—as a chronicle or a symphony, so you will invite the reader on your first page—to listen to an overture, or to begin at the beginning. ‘There was a man—dwelt by a churchyard’: nothing could be better than that in the way of opening. ‘It was the old way:

‘ Hit befel in the days of Uther Pendragon when he was Kynge of all England, and so regned, that there was a myghty duke in Cornewaill that helde warre ageynst hym long tyme.’

That is how the greatest of all romances begins—at the beginning; and yet it has in it the germ of the overture; for it gives you the things upon which romance depends, colour and the theme. It is not the epic manner, remark;

there the convention is clear. In epic you begin with the theme. It is not for nothing that the *Iliad* begins with a wrath, and the *Odyssey* with a man. But romance, which breathes by colour, adds it to the theme, and so it is with the ballad :

It fell about the Martinmas time,  
When the wind blew snell and cauld :

there, and in things like it, is the theme presented as colour. Some such thing, no doubt, was in Stevenson's mind when he held forth to a correspondent upon the necessity for a novel to 'begin to end badly', or 'well', as may be. He quarrelled with the happy opening of *Richard Feverel*, if I remember rightly.

Well then, with the opening of the *Morte d'Arthur* in our heads, here is its lineal descendant of the nineteenth century, in a brisk exordium :

‘About thirty years ago, Miss Maria Ward, of Huntingdon, with only seven thousand pounds, had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram, of Mansfield Park, in the county of Northampton, and to be thereby raised to the rank of a baronet’s lady, with all the comforts and consequences of a handsome home and large income.’

As I say, brisk, business-like, crisp, epigrammatic. Colour is watered down to a question of the almanacs ; theme is there, without being forced upon us. Yet it is entirely adequate to the matter in hand. In its way it is an overture, if only to a toy-symphony. It tunes us up. We stand upon the shore of an unknown sea, ready for the baronet’s lady and all her *sequelae*. Miss Austen is, I consider, one of our best beginners. How admirable is that of *Emma* !

Much had happened in the interval between Sir Thomas Malory and her. Among other things Defoe had invented the novel, and therefore, in a way, Miss Austen herself. He saw, however, no better way of doing it than to make a chronicle of it, which had been Sir Thomas's way too ; but there was one vast difference between them. Both began at the beginning ; but Sir Thomas used colour to enhance his tale, and Defoe to lower it. Sir Thomas would enchant you, lift you into 'realms of old' ; Defoe would sober you down. Both used persuasion—Literature is for ever linked with cookery—but Sir Thomas would have you see reality as a dream, Defoe a dream as a reality. Here is Defoe at his best :

'I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York, of a good family though not of that county, my Father being a Foreigner of Bremen, who settled first at Hull...'

He runs on with his particularities : his mother's name Robinson, his father's Kreutznaer, and so on. That was Defoe's manner, which I suspect to have been derived from Cervantes. He had the same love of verisimilitude, and the same need of it, though more daintiness in its employ :

'In a village of La Mancha, the name of which I have no desire to call to mind, there lived not long since one of those gentlemen that keep a lance in the lance-rack, an old buckler, a lean hack, and a greyhound for coursing.'

That is a much more literary, but not more artful, manner than Defoe's, essentially the same. It is carefully compressed ; Defoe's, with equal care, is diffuse. Both have

had their followers. Defoe's has outlasted the greater man's. Meantime another style of narration had been discovered which I hope I shall be forgiven for calling the Cheap-Jack manner. The Cheap-Jack persuades by dazzle, by hypnosis. He has unlimited words at his tongue's end, and bemuses you with the flood of them. Rabelais is answerable for that :

‘Most noble and illustrious drinkers, and you thrice-precious profligates (for to you and none else do I dedicate my writings), Alcibiades, in that dialogue of Plato's . . .’

and so on, and so on—for ever. And that also is Sterne's way of doing it. True, *Tristram Shandy* begins at the beginning, and indeed at the very beginning—but with what chirping, with what prattle !

‘I wish either my father or mother, or indeed both of them, as they were in duty both equally bound to it, had minded what they were about when they begot me . . .’

Tristram does not get himself born at that rate until the beginning of Chapter V, there being so much more of Opinions than of Life in his immortal memoir. With a book like that you have neither theme nor colour to predispose you to its perusal. You have curiosity, that only. I know people who have tried to read *Tristram Shandy* for the story, to see what happened. And I know what did happen. ‘Fratello, tu non voi esser inteso : io non ti voglio intendere—vai con cento diavoli.’ That is how an Italian, according to Dean Church, treated an ‘enigmatic prophet’, before throwing him into the fire. ‘My dear

man, you have no desire to be understood, and I no desire to understand you. Go to the deuce.' A good many novel-readers have bidden Sterne to the deuce; and I don't at all shrink from owning that I have never reached the end of *Shandy*—or of *Gargantua* either, for that matter. The Cheap-Jack, in fact, must stand or fall upon his own gifts. If his kind of nonsense suits yours, well and good.

Fielding had not the patter for that way of opening. You may call his the arm-chair, port-and-walnuts way, and not be wrong. He had the passion for dissertation; he loved it for its own sake as well as his own; he must buttonhole the reader. That made him a bad starter, though not nearly so bad as Sir Walter Scott; both *Amelia* and *Tom Jones* begin at Chapter II, *Tom Jones* hardly there. I think the appetite grew upon him with his growing facility. In *Tom Jones* you have an overture to pretty well every chapter, asides and proscenium-appearances which really hold up the action. Thackeray, deriving very much from him, was nevertheless better at getting away with the thing. Nothing could be better than the openings of *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis*, nothing more sententious and ambigual than the first chapter of *The Newcomes*, which, however, is put into the pen of Pendennis himself, a first-class prig. In *Esmond* you are, or ought to be, prepared for the easy circumlocutions of Sir Richard Steele—but except you are uncommonly quick on the uptake, you are *not* so prepared. As a consequence, *Esmond* succeeds generally on a second perusal, and better and better as you re-read. But comparatively few there be of the ordinary run of readers who find it again after the first rebuff. Dickens was an excellent starter, using

many manners, mostly well. ‘The kettle began it’ is not a happy instance. That is a bang on the drum, like a showman’s at a fair. But what could be better than the beginning of *Dombe*y?

‘Dombey sat in the corner of the darkened room in the great arm-chair by the bedside, and Son lay tucked up warm in a little basket bedstead, carefully disposed on a low settee immediately in front of the fire, and close to it, as if his constitution were analogous to that of a muffin, and it was essential to toast him brown while he was very new.’

Allowing for Dickens’s weakness for far-fetched images, that is as good a formula as you could want for the beginning of a novel. Theme and colour both there. The next paragraph is quite as good, and the whole chapter keeps it up. What is especially artful about it is that, while it is beginning at the beginning in the good old way, it is also an overture, according to new doctrine. Others followed him hard—Charles Reade, Wilkie Collins, Walter Besant, and the smaller fry.

‘She went into the garden to cut a cabbage to make an apple-pie. And while she was there . . .’

From the genius to whom that opening was revealed come Henry James and all the modern novelists, ‘so many and so many and such glee,’ who begin their books in the middle—Mr. Conrad and a countless host. Mr. James did not hit upon the device until the *mezzo del cammin* of his mortal career, and, as some would have it, at the end of his immortal. *The Portrait of a Lady* begins with a dissertation about tea, very much as *Tom Jones* with one about things in general. But later on we come to ‘She

went into the garden', or even to 'So she went into the garden', which is to take a very high line with the reader. I neither accuse nor defend. All that I am concerned to say about it is that, beginning in the middle, he was generally skilful enough to avoid the explicit harking-back which others have not been able to do—to their detriment, I think. For see what happens. If the middle of the story is the beginning of the novel, the beginning of the novel will be the middle of the story; and what then becomes of Form, which all discuss and none understand? I don't pretend to admire the formula, anyhow, and have never been tempted to adopt it. You gain very little by it, and inevitably lose much. Mr. James became its bond-slave at the last, wound himself in webs of explication which involved him ever the deeper. I daresay he did it as well as it could be done—but was it worth doing? I doubt it.

Lastly, you can begin at the end. Mr. de Morgan did that once. His hero, the teller of the tale, is on his death-bed when the scene opens. This dismal fact haunted me. The tale was long. 'He'll never last out, poor wretch,' was always at the back of my mind as I read on.

But here is enough of novels. *Per correr miglior acqua,* for a moment.

I began with prose, and shall end with it, but wish to say a word about epics while it is in my head. It is quite true that the practice of Homer, to begin strictly with the theme, has been observed in Europe from Apollonius Rhodius, through Virgil, and the Italian sugar-baker epopeists—of whose openings Tasso's full-sounding line,

Canto l'armi pietose, e 'l capitano,

is much the best---; through the mock-epics down to the parlour-epics of Cowper—

I sing the Sofa.

It has been followed, I take it, for the plain reason that there is no better way of beginning a really great piece of work than by telling yourself and the rest of the world just what you are going to do. But the absence of colour, the avoidance of all pretence to an overture, must have some other reason—which I suppose to be this, that the Epic has been and has remained a classical composition, making no attempt at spherical music, having neither space, time, nor inclination for it, depending wholly on character and plot. Even in modern, romantic times, even when built upon romance, as most of the confectionery epics were—Boiardo's, Pulci's, Ariosto's—the rule has held. I am not ready to admit that the *Chanson de Roland* is the exception which it seems to be. That, as we have it, is an epic fragment. Nobody can be sure how it began, except that it was not as it begins now. The invocation of the muse, another convention of the Epic, is a piece of piety, archaic or not, with which I don't at all mind confessing my sympathy.

Mock-epics may doubtless be reckoned by fifties (mostly, I hope, in caves), but at the moment I can only remember two, and have the same fault to find with each of them. Tassoni begins his *Secchia Rapita* in the regular way—

Vorrei cantar quel memorando sdegno,  
Ch' infiammò già ne' fieri petti umani  
Un' infelice e vil Secchia di legno . . .

But what an extraordinary blunder of his, to let down his

whole comic apparatus in the third line of the poem, and (so to speak) kick the bucket before he has begun! If you wished to pull the thing off I don't see how you could treat the bucket too ceremoniously. It is the pivot of your plot, without which you have nothing to say. But I don't myself think that Tassoni did pull it off. Pope, on the other hand, certainly did, though he made it more difficult by just the same too early disparagement of his theme:

What dire offence from am'rous causes springs,  
What mighty contests rise from trivial things,  
I sing. This verse to Caryl, Muse! is due:  
This ev'n Belinda may vouchsafe to view:  
*Slight is the subject*, but not so the praise,  
If She inspire, and He approve my lays.

What an ineptitude, when the slightness of the subject was the very opportunity of the poem! Then we come to Cowper and *The Task*.

*The Task* is not a mock-epic, though it is a good deal more amusing than either of those I have just looked at. Part of its humour consists in the employment of heavy machinery for a light purpose—as if you should use a Nasmyth hammer for pounding sugar, or a steam-roller for a cider-press; and it is just possible that his word of extenuation is noticeable. If it is noticeable it is wrong—that's certain. I must now give the exordium:

I sing the Sofa. I, who lately sang  
Truth, Hope, and Charity, and touch'd with awe  
The solemn chords, and with a trembling hand,  
Escap'd with pain from that advent'rous flight,  
Now seek repose upon an humbler theme;  
The theme though humble, yet august and proud  
Th' occasion—for the Fair commands the song.

What a gentleman Cowper was ! There is no other way of appraising the mastery and courtliness of that beginning. The next paragraph is exactly right :

Time was, when clothing sumptuous or for use,  
Save their own painted skins, our sires had none.  
As yet black breeches were not ; satin smooth,  
Or velvet soft, or plush with shaggy pile :  
The hardy chief upon the rugged rock  
Wash'd by the sea, or on the grav'ly bank,

*Fearless of wrong, repos'd his weary strength.*

Surely, a masterpiece of serio-comic writing. The more one reads of Cowper the more one loves him.

'Nothing shows up a bad sonnet so well as to imagine a church built on such lines.' I am reminded of that saying of Renan's by coming naturally to Wordsworth and his way of opening a great poem, and recollecting the figure which he used to describe his, borrowed from architecture, not from music. *The Recluse* he said was to have been conceived of as a 'Gothic Cathedral', of which *The Prelude* might be considered as the 'ante-chapel'. It is calling one a symphony and t'other an overture, in other words, and distinguishing the work from Epic. *The Recluse* was certainly not an epic. The subject of it was much too subtle for epic treatment. But it was of epic proportions. One book of it, the only one we have, is of 9,000 lines : *The Prelude* is of 7,000. Whether you pound upon the theme or not by way of opening, whether you stand in an ante-chapel and look before you into the soaring immensities of a nave ; whether your mind is prepared by solemn organ-tones, or the shrilling of a trumpet—whatever or whichever you do, I cannot allow that Wordsworth did fairly by a poem which was designed to be the longest, if not the

weightiest, in our tongue when he began *The Prelude* by a remark about the weather—

Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze !

But to return to prose, and sum up this curious matter, one would say that, for a great book, a significant prelude, some ‘music of preparation and awakening suspense’, was required. But, to judge by examples, it would seem that it is not so. There is Gibbon. If ever a man felt the solemnity of dedication to a life’s work, took up the yoke, knew the touch of the live coal, heard the voice saying, Write, it was Gibbon. He has told us himself how and when he learned what his task was to be. But how placidly he sets out the counters on the board—like an old woman going to play draughts !

‘In the second century of the Christian Era, the Empire of Rome comprehended the fairest part of the earth, and the most civilized portion of mankind. The frontiers of that extensive monarchy were guarded by ancient renown and disciplined valour. The gentle, but powerful, influence of laws and manners had gradually cemented the union of the provinces. Their peaceful inhabitants enjoyed and abused the advantages of wealth and luxury....’

It is a mild, though an adequate beginning to a work which was (and he knew it) to assure him immortality. Yes, it is ‘adequate’—but for one word, the word ‘abused’. He should have left that out. No doubt the Roman citizens did abuse their advantages—Gibbon is there to say so—but do you, should you, beg the question of your whole twelve volumes in the first paragraph of the first of them ! I cannot think it.

Try another. Here is the beginning of *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, a great book, done with a great gesture :

‘A new voice hailed me of an old friend when, first returned from the Peninsula, I paced again in that long street of Damascus which is called Straight ; and suddenly taking me wondering by the hand, “Tell me (said he) since thou art here again in the peace and assurance of Ullah, and whilst we walk, as in the former years, toward the new blossoming orchards, full of the sweet spring as the garden of God, what moved thee, or how couldst thou take such journeys into the fanatic Arabia?”’

Mr. Doughty is employing a machine, somewhat worn down in these days, the machine of the inquiring friend and the long recital ; the machine indeed of *The Arabian Nights*. Yet it is a beautiful prelude : and it is all the prelude. The next paragraph plunges into the middle of the beginning, and we are off into the dangerous wild. I repeat, a beautiful prelude ; but to end I will cap it with a better—Kinglake’s to *Eöthen*.

‘At Semlin I still was encompassed by the scenes and sounds of familiar life ; the din of a busy world still vexed and cheered me ; the unveiled faces of women still shone in the light of day. Yet, whenever I chose to look southward, I saw the Ottoman’s fortress—austere, and darkly impending high over the vale of the Danube—historic Belgrade. I had come, as it were, to the end of this wheel-going Europe, and now my eyes would see the splendour and havoc of the East.’

‘The splendour and havoc of the East.’ I cannot charge my memory or find in my library a more fitting prelude to adventure or a more infallible bar of music upon which to open the pages of a good book.

## *Thoughts on Doric*

THERE may be readers who cannot see how ‘Black-mwore maidens’ differ from ‘Blackmore girls’, except in print. They, of course, will get nothing from

The primrwose in the sheäde do blow,  
The cowslip in the zun,

except a slight sensation of oddness. Barnes wrote like that originally, because, as he said, he could not help it, latterly because he came to adjudge the Dorsetshire vernacular as a ‘tongue’ and not a ‘corruption’. That was also Mr. Hardy’s opinion, from whom I quote it. Personally I am not prepared to accept Barnes’s judgement, though I think his instinct was right. The question then is, why was it right?

It is to be observed, first of all, that he composed, as we all do now, for readers of the word, and not hearers only. There is—or was—a very real sense in which poetry could be regarded as the music of the mind; but directly you cut off music from the hearing ear and approach that organ through the eyes you may be driven to typographic freaks, to a sort of phonetic spelling, if you despair otherwise of carrying your reader with you into your islands of the blest. Barnes evidently did so despair, because, secondly, I observe that he did not write Dorsetshire prose, but only Dorsetshire verse. In short, what he sought to obtain by his Doric was character. I suppose that was what Dickens was after when he transliterated Sam Weller. I might even suppose that it was what Burns was after,

if that were not to involve me in supposing that it was what Mistral was after.

William Barnes was born with the nineteenth century (in 1801), and almost lived it out, dying in 1886. From birth to death I don't think that he was ever, for long together, more than forty miles away from where I sit. The speech he heard and used is the speech I hear every day ; the men and women of his commerce are also mine ; the grassy solitudes, open downs, water-meadows, quiet clear streams of which he sang are as familiar to me as the tongue in which he sang them. Pentridge, where he was born, is some eight miles away ; Came, where he died, not so much as forty. I know Blackmore Vale from end to end. It would be foolish to call this country the oldest part of Britain, yet I may say that there is at least no part of it where you can be more conscious how old Britain is, or how long ago there were Britons in it. The hills of Pentridge and of Dorchester are thick with relics of the dead ; here also I have only to walk a mile from my house to find myself standing amid the vestiges of a people who lived in community there before Stonehenge was raised up on the Plain. It is wonderful to me to consider those dim neolithic men and women, still more to understand that I live among their descendants at this day, and am in all probability descended from them myself, inheriting who knows what instincts, aptitudes, prejudices, manner of conduct, habit of vision ; helpless resultant of how much passion ; blind traveller through how much tangled growth ! Something of all this may be reflected in Barnes's manner —that is, in his Doric ; but there is none of it in his matter. His insensibility to history is remarked upon by

Coventry Patmore, one of his warmest admirers, and can hardly escape any reader. Yet he was a learned man, and a careful metrist. His verse has qualities which must endear it to all lovers of poetry. It is musical, fluent, facile and accomplished. It is much more artful than it appears to be. His rhythms are fetched from as far as Persia, some of them, and cunningly contrived. He touches the emotions readily, being emotional himself; seldom the heart. His emotions, however, are very near the surface. Nothing is significant to him but appearance; and being of sanguine temperament, he 'sees the world the colour he is of'. All his maidens are pretty (and certainly Dorsetshire girls are often pretty), and all his young men are true, which is by no means the fact. The sun is mostly shining in his landscapes: he prefers to sing of the hay-time. He is, in fact, an idyllist. The terrible, the bitter, the desperate, the hopeless things are passed over. He does not, then, present so much a reading as a confection of earth, and to correct your understanding of life in Dorsetshire, or anywhere else for that matter, a study of his disciple, Mr. Hardy, must supplement your study of Barnes. Village life resembles all other lives in this at least, that the desire of man is in continual conflict with his means, and generally gets the worst of it. The favour and the prettiness of Barnes's pictures lose poignancy without some hint of that long struggle.

It is very seldom that he probes so deeply into life as in *Woak Hill*:

When sycamore leaves wer a-spreadèn,  
    Green-ruddy in hedges,  
Bezide the red doust o' the ridges,  
    A-dried at Woak Hill;

I packed up my goods all a-sheenèn  
 Wi' long years o' handlèn,  
 On dusty red wheels ov a waggon,  
 To ride at Woak Hill.

The brown thatchen ruf o' the dwellèn  
 I then wer a-leävèn,  
 Had shelter'd the sleek head o' Meäry,  
 My bride at Woak Hill.

But now vor zome years, her light voot-vall  
 'S a-lost vrom the vlooren.  
 Too soon vor my jaÿ an' my childern  
 She died at Woak Hill.

That is by Barnes, but might well be the younger man's. I think it his most touching and beautiful poem, and don't doubt that his own bereavement moved it. Surely, also, it gained by its Doric. But how far it and its Doric speak for the peasant whom Barnes so much loved, of whose blood indeed he was, can only be found out by hearing the peasant speak for himself. Listen to him then.

I'll do as much for my true-love  
 As any young man may ;  
 I'll sit and mourn all at her grave  
 For a twelvemonth and a day.

Nobody can mistake. That is the voice of the peasant, speaking from the deeps. And without Doric to help him. You will hear no such cry from Barnes, even when he is most moved, as he surely was in *Woak Hill*. Burns has touched that piercing simplicity; so has Heine. That poet of La Bresse, Gabriel Vicaire, of whom M. France has written so sympathetically, has touched it, as I think.

Elle est au milieu de l'église  
 Sur un tréteau qu'on a dressé.

Elle est en face de la Vierge,  
 Elle qui pécha tant de fois.  
 A ses pieds fume un petit cierge  
 Dans un long chandelier de bois.

That is a poet ‘qui s’est fait une âme rustique’, a thing which many have desired to do for love of country people, but few have ever really done. I cannot think that Barnes ever did. He seldom gets near the realities of things. He made too many pictures. He was moved by appearances. Into accidents he read substance—which wasn’t there.

The primrwose in the sheäde do blow,  
 The cowslip in the zun,  
 The thyme upon the down do grow,  
 The clote where streams do run ;  
 An’ where do pretty maidens grow  
 An’ blow, but where the tow’r  
 Do rise among the bricken tuns  
 In Blackmwore by the Stour !

That is charming, and has the wild-thyme savour. Without the Doric, however, it would be mildly Arcadian, of no significance one way or the other.

But Doric of itself will not supply character, and it is want of character which makes any lengthy reading of Barnes desolating work. Excellent, pious, affectionate man as he was, I don’t know that he had very much character to impart. Coventry Patmore, who praised his verses highly, nevertheless said of his personality that it was ‘simple, moral, externally neither cold nor sympathetic, and, except as it comes out in his poetry, uninteresting to outsiders: lacking as it did the general expressiveness which the possession of genius usually gives’. Of his ‘personal converse’ he goes on to say that it was ‘very

much what might have been expected from an ordinarily good, capable, and self-educated man who had spent his life between the cares of a country school and the promulgation of more or less crotchety philological views.' That is the description of a man without idiosyncrasy. Not only was Barnes himself without it, but I think he failed to discern it in the country of his predilection and in the people with whom he lived familiarly. It was right instinct which directed him to compose in Doric, for there's character at least in that. It is all that you will get in *Hwomely Rhymes*. When he yielded to the persuasions of Alexander Macmillan and translated his vernacular into *Poems of Rural Life in Common English*, even Patmore was obliged to say that 'though still better than any recent poet's work in the same kind', they were 'very common English indeed when compared with his native woodnotes wild'. They were amiable, and they were accomplished; but they were verse, and not poetry.

Will Doric, then, turn verse into poetry? It will not; but it will turn a reader into a poet—or the moment; and that's something.

## *The Death of Society*<sup>1</sup>

I AM not proposing to review Miss Romer Wilson's Siegmund-and-Sieglinde idyll at the moment, but have made bold to lift the title she has given it to what I think a more appropriate place, and that is a short consideration of the manners and customs reflected in Miss Rose Macaulay's recent study of a section of society. Miss Wilson's book could have done with an apter name. No kind of Society is going to die because youthful mouth seeks youthful mouth. That has been going on ever since there was a society to live or die, and long before that. By way of parenthesis, however, I might stay to remark that when youthful mouth seeks two youthful mouths of the other sex for its satisfaction, and those of mother and daughter at that, such society as it represents, though not likely to die, lacks tone, and had better see a doctor. That is by the way.

I regard Miss Macaulay's study of her world as more indicative of a moribund society. *Dangerous Ages*, she calls it; and as she selects sixty-three, forty-three and twenty for diagnosis, it will be seen that, according to her, society is pretty generally sick. It is true that her field is limited. She only deals with the maladies of women, and of a particular class of women—those who live in London and the suburbs, and used to be called the Idle Rich a few years ago. But London is a very large place, which seems

<sup>1</sup>*The Death of Society*, by Romer Wilson; *Dangerous Ages*, by Rose Macaulay.

larger still when you live in it. Miss Macaulay makes it reach to Guildford on one side and St. Margaret's Bay on another. And so it does; and to Brighton on another, and Hitchin on another. It is also the fact that it holds a great many of those women, and of the parasites of both sexes and no sexes who live upon them. I doubt myself whether they are worth the ability and subtlety she has bestowed. I prefer Miss Macaulay when she is doing burlesque. Serious novel-writing demands a more serious subject, a something of the universal, a something of the abiding element in life. Her people are perverts or neurotics: *libido*, as she thinks, money and idleness have made them what they are, a thing not permanent. They are infertile, and in the struggle which is hard upon us must go down before the fertile classes. That is a certainty, because child-bearing and child-rearing women must and will be fed, whatever happens.

I have lived almost wholly in the country for several years, and my visits to London have been fitful and as short as possible. I don't pretend that I have furrowed very deeply into life as it is lived up there now; but I have been struck by a little thing or two which seem to me significant. Most of the young men I have met with belong to the Labour Party, a Platonic attachment which does not seem to involve them in labour, at least; and practically all the young women walk about half-clad. The symptoms correlate. The undressing of the mind of man has always involved that of the body of woman. Supply follows demand. Until that relationship can be corrected female suffrage is not going to be much advantage to the female sex. But most people knew that before. The peculiar mental twist which the symptoms indicate is not, with all respect

to Miss Macaulay and her psycho-analysts, properly towards *libido*. There is more involved than appetite and curiosity. *Libido, le plaisir*, has lost itself now in *talento*. *Il talento*, according to the Italians who first observed the thing and made the phrase to suit it, is that mixture of desire and opportunity to gratify which can raise itself, like a bed of nettles in a croft, the moment the moral forces are let down. Caesar Borgia is the common example of *il talento*. Shakespeare, who knew everything without learning anything, put up Iago, who cannot be bettered. The fences were markedly down, and *il talento* gadded like a weed, in the Italian Renaissance; so here from 1660 onwards until the Revolution; so in France when Louis XIV's hand was taken off; and now it is all over Europe. 'Who fills the butchers' shops with large blue flies?' What keeps Europe as a butcher's shop? *Il talento*. It urged D'Annunzio into Fiume; it was behind Korfanty in Silesia. It is the ferment in the blood of De Valera. It inspires young men to murder their sweethearts for a pound note or two, to hold up post-office assistants while the till is cleared, to club chauffeurs from behind and steal their motor-cars. Men fear neither God nor the policeman. In its own smaller way the class which Miss Macaulay has been studying is similarly affected, though not moved to deeds of blood or to rapes: we are dealing with a community of talkers. Here is one of her subjects, bored with an unsuccessful love-chase in Cornwall:

'At Newlyn Nan stopped. She said she was going to supper with some one there and would come on later. She was, in fact, tired of them. She dropped into Stephen Lumley's studio, which was, as usual after painting hours, full of his friends, talking and smoking.

That was the only way to spend the evening, thought Nan, talking and smoking and laughing, and never pausing.'

London is full of such Nans. The sanctions are down, and the darnels thrive. The end of it all will be, broadly speaking, the end of the nettle-bed. It will seed and gad until it becomes a nuisance or an offence. When the real party—I mean the people who labour and don't talk—labour has reached the appointed term, whether it be the point of starvation or the limit of irritability, it will take to the scythe. After the scythe the plow. And then, no doubt, the whole thing will begin over again. It sounds like a *mauvaise plaisanterie*; but Nature works like that.

Although nobody might be so surprised to know it as Miss Macaulay's young Bolsheviks and Russian Ballet ladies, there *is* a labour party, not yet a Labour Party, which works, and says nothing, observes much, and knows all about it. It is a silent but uncompromising critic. It has standards of its own based upon tradition incredibly ancient, rigidly observed—standards which have scarcely shifted since the neolithic age, which sometimes conflict with the political or social law of the day, but never with the laws of being. A society which still works, still breeds, and still believes in love, not as an aberration but as a function of sex; one also which confesses to a moral law, needs but little more to be formidable. I think it is in the way to obtain it. If it has learned anything out of modern life it is the right of private judgement of which a long servitude had until lately deprived it. If it had gained anything out of mechanical development it is facility of communication. These two advantages taken together make it now possible for an inexpressive host to become self-conscious, and class-

conscious; and those are the first steps, always, to revolution. Here they will be prelude to a revolution which must indeed prove incidentally the death of Society. Neither strikes, nor red flags, nor Bolshevism, will so surely procure it. Nor can a parliament prevent it. Parliament, if it ever hold up its head again, which many doubt, will do little more than wag it. Irritation, flaming into sudden passion, will make an end of the Society so acutely observed by Miss Macaulay. The people who obey the laws of being will take what they need under pressure of those laws, and the others, who neither work, nor love, nor breed, will disappear. The logic of things will see to it, aided by economic pressure. The bubbles of talk in their envelope of cigarette smoke will break and merge in the atmosphere. Poverty will make Britain a small country again, and very soon. But a very jolly country! Imagine it—a place inhabited only by people who do their jobs!

## Gentlemen's Seats

DOES anybody remember the opening of *Eöthen*, where Methley and Kinglake set out with their Suridgees and dragoman from the gates of Belgrade? It is good reading. They file off on to the plain, with their 'stiff angular portmanteaus of Europe', sitting quietly on pack-saddles, a goodly troop of men and animals pushing forth into the unknown, all but one of them screwed up to the right romantic traveller's pitch. That one protestant was Methley's Yorkshire servant, 'who always rode doggedly on in his pantry jacket, looking out for "gentlemen's seats".' An oddly pathetic figure, who would be ill at ease were he living now.

For the first time in its life of three hundred years or so a great house in my country is to let, one of the great houses of the realm; not historically so in the sense that Haddon is, or Berkeley Castle, but great by reason of its size and solid magnificence I don't know that I ever saw a finer house in its way, except perhaps in Vicenza which is Palladio's town. I believe that Longleat was built by Sir John Vanbrugh, who as we all know built solidly. He was accused of being very heavy upon earth: he built for posterity. And now it is posterity which lets him down! If he had thought about such things, as naturally he did not, he could have guessed as much. For humanity is more fragile than any of its toys, and I daresay that a golf-ball might live for ever if men would only let it alone. As

for Longleat, it may well endure until the next ice-age, except for dynamite and the like of that. Consider the Pyramids! Longleat is of their fibre. Not so the lords of Longleat. Alas, they feel the pinch of things, like you and me—in fact more, it is probable, since the greater the pinchable superficies the sharper the tweak which you will get. Therefore, for a time at least, Sir John Drygoods and his dynasty will reign in the stead of the Thynnes, as Mr. Selfridge and his are about to open in that of the Pettys.

But that is not all. There is another great house hereabouts, of a more illustrious history, and, as I think, of more pleasant seat, whose days seem to be threatened. Strange rumours of it float about, how well-founded I don't know. When I first became aware of the place I was told that forty gardeners served its needs. It was said that there were seven miles of grass-edging to be cut every week; that there was a kitchen-garden with a mile of peach-wall about it, and so on. Later, I saw it with these eyes. I did not count the gardeners, nor step the edging; but it is true about the peach-wall. Well, they say now that those noble gardens are let to some contractor or another who will sell you the produce of them retail. You may go in, they tell me, and buy your twopennyworth of radishes. Well, and why not? The times are hard. What else, time and the nature of man being what they are, can happen to that great showplace in Kent, where in the old days the fees of the sight-seers used just to pay the wages of the thirty housemaids? Nowadays, supposing that you could by any chance amass thirty housemaids, what fees do you suppose would cover their wages? Or that other gigantic house, in Sussex, whose guests used to

be lost on their way to bed, and wander the corridors like tramps ! Or that haunted pile in North-East Scotland, with walls ten feet thick ! How long will plain Sir John fit himself within such frames ? Who can use, or who can want to use such acreage of splendour now ? What will happen to them all ? There's nothing for it but a tag. This is the end of every man's desire.

If it is true, and I believe it is, or is to be so, that the great country house is as little to the taste of Sir John as congruous with the pocket of my lord, we are within easy distance of a new dispensation which will see the main of these palaces converted into county institutions or country clubs on the American model, and some no doubt become quarries for village-building, garden-cities and the like. Then Methley's poor retainer might, indeed, wish that he had never been born. But such things should not surprise us. They have happened here once or twice before. I need not go back to the castle-razing of the twelfth century, blessing undisguised as that must have been ; but I will invite the reader to reflect upon the destruction of the monasteries, and what that must have meant. A transformation of the whole countryside, no less. Not a county in England but must have felt its treadings well-nigh slipped. Wipe out three times as many cathedral churches as we have now, four times the number of great houses, and you will have a notion of what happened. Glastonbury, the greatest church in England, clean gone ; Walsingham, St. Edmundsbury, Malmesbury, Shaftesbury, Reading, Fountains, Jervaulx, Whitby—but why go on ? The names remain in every county, and a few piled stones stand witness to a bygone civilization. And the great houses to which those churches gave reason meant much

more to the people than our present Belvoirs, Welbecks, and Hatfields have ever meant ; for there was the Church, a centre of worship and a beacon to the eyes for leagues about it ; there was the convent, not imparked, janitored and remote, but with door and buttery-hatch open to all comers. There was no Poor Law while the monasteries stood, and it wasn't long before the peasantry felt the lack of them. As far as they were concerned it was blank loss. There was no protestant zeal among them to be gratified, that is certain. In fact they lost more than they have ever found afterwards when, as I once said elsewhere, the Authority, under the inspiration of Geneva, turned Madonna out of Church.

This is not the moment to go into all that. But imagine England covered with vast, accessible, friendly, open houses, and churches annexed to them. Imagine those cast down, stripped of their lead, robbed of their ornaments ; sold ; then walled in and profaned ; or unsold and left derelict, as the case might be. There exists in some collection of those things a lament over Walsingham, the great pilgrimage-place of the East, which I have seen but cannot now find, one of the most touching I have ever read. It is a pure elegy of the ‘ How are the mighty fallen ’ kind : not the outraged cry of a devotee for the desecrated image of Our Lady of Walsingham, but merely a threnody of loss. The noble towers, the shining vanes which used to herald the morning sun, the pleasant seat, the goodly hospitality—Woe’s me for Walsingham ! is the burden of it. And what Norfolk felt for Walsingham, Somerset knew for Glastonbury, and Wilts. for Lacock and Malmesbury. There was real loss behind the grief.

Glory and loveliness will pass with the great houses,

perfection in its kind. But a perfection which requires a wall of defence, gates and gate-keepers, forty gardeners, thirty housemaids, and fees from the general public is not one over whose vanishing one need shed tears. Splendour as such does not touch the heart. Monastic worship may have been ridiculous, may have been worse ; but monastic service was better than none at all ; and when the high days of Stowe, or Chatsworth, or Wilton, are recorded the civic virtues in them are inconspicuous, to say the least. They will, most of them, remain beautiful things—unless they become quarries, when they will become useful things. I daresay that half of North Wilts. is built of the stones of Malmesbury. Some such turn may be served by those of Longleat when Sir John finds out that there's nothing to it.

## *Kentucky*

I HAVE never been to Kentucky, and as things now are with me am never likely to be there. Nevertheless I have had visions, helped thereto by amiable correspondents; and perhaps they are more pleasing than the reality would be. The edges may be a little too raw, possibly, for one used to the blur and patina given to any part of Europe, Asia, and Africa by many old civilizations. Yet I think I would risk local abrasions for the sake of the fundamental sweetness which I seem to discover in that country.

I see a long narrow valley running up between scrub-covered hills. It is misty with heat under a cloudless morning sky. Midway its length I see 'the lone shieling', very much of the poet's imagining. It is not hard to picture the laborious days, the nights of rest and security which are being spent there, which I too might spend, to the immediate profit and happiness of obscure contented men and women—*quorum pars!*—and the indirect advantage (I cannot doubt) of a world which takes no trouble whatever to deserve it. And one of those advantages is the not inaccessible existence of a place and way of life very different from those which may be observed in London, or Manchester, or New York. When man, that dangerous, aggressive, and frequently obscene beast, is not killing, or robbing, or vilifying his own kind, we know that he sometimes affords himself pastoral melancholy, kindly thoughts

of home and beauty, and suchlike simple refreshment. Well, he will find out how those blessed things may be had, possibly nearer at hand, but certainly in Kentucky.

An unknown friend from that state has sent me two pretty books about it: *Twenty Kentucky Mountain Songs* is one, and *Lonesome Tunes* is the other. Truly, as the Editor of them, Mr. Loraine Wyman, says in a preface, ‘There is a unique and individual quality’ in those artless songs, which (to quote him again) ‘have sung their way through countless generations, unwritten and unrecorded’, until now. That is very nearly true. If they are not so unique in appeal to us as they are to Mr. Wyman it is because a good proportion of them are of our own making, and went over the Atlantic stored in the hearts of those who left our shores. What is strange, and even ‘unique’ to us is that in the hiving United States there should still be found a race of men ‘entirely detached from the outside world for many generations’; men who ‘have lived their lives oblivious of modern progress, and remained, like their forefathers, simple people of the soil’. That is strange, to our understanding, and, to mine, of inexpressible value. For human nature, as it appears to me, is fundamentally honest, only disgusting in its accidents. How then shall we not value a society where the staple can be found whereby to correct and readjust our strayed and aberrant selves?

But let me consider the Muse of Kentucky, and record, to begin with, how near she is of kindred with our own rustic genius. First, she borrows, as surely she may. In one volume I find ‘Lord Thomas and Fair Ellendor’, as they call her in those parts, ‘Little Matthew Grove’, which is the best they can do for ‘Little Musgrave’; in another ‘Barbara Allen’, ‘The Briery Bush’, ‘Lord

Bateman', 'Sweet William and Lady Margery', and others, more or less degenerate. In none of their versions, I am bound to say, can I find a better text than some of ours; on the other hand there are songs of our own there to which local idiosyncrasy has added local colour, and a good deal more interest with it. A case of that is a well-known country song, 'Where have you been all the day, My boy Willie?' Mr. Cecil Sharp finds four verses of it. In Kentucky 'Billie Boy' runs to seven, all with the refrain

She's a young thing, cannot leave her Mother;  
and among the young thing's accomplishments are several which our boy Willie would not have expected. She can bake a cherry pie, in Kentucky; she can 'sweep up a house'; she can 'bake a pone [*sic*] of bread between the oven and the lid'; she can 'make up a bed seven feet above her head'. Added graces of hers are that

She's as tall as any pine,  
And as straight as pumpkin vine.

We can place the girl, and her lover too, and see for ourselves the life they are to make of it together in Kentucky, if all goes well.

'The Daemon Lover' is a fine ballad. He is called James Harris in our Devonshire version, and has no name to him in the Scots, which William Laidlaw took down for Sir Walter. Kentucky does not name him either. He went away to sea for seven years, leaving his girl behind him. She in due course up and married a carpenter, called a 'house-carpenter' in Kentucky. When James Harris came back, as young Jamie to Mrs. Robin Gray, he persuaded her to leave carpenter and child and sail the sea with

him. Very properly they were drowned, but before that she asks him

What hills, what hills, my own true love,  
What hills so dark and low?  
That is the hills of hell, my love,  
Where you and I must go.

What hills, what hills, my own true love,  
What hills as white as snow?  
That is the hills of heaven, my love,  
Where you and I can't go.

I quote Kentucky, not so good as the Scots, but much more impressive than the English variant.

If we want original work we find some in the 'The Ground Hog', for that is an unknown beast of chase to us—unless a ground hog is a badger. It is a good hunting song.

Whet up your knife and whistle up your dog,  
We're going to the hills to hunt a ground hog,  
Whackfol doodle all day.

You draw your ground hog with a ten-foot pole. So did Berry and Kate in the song. Then they

Took him by the tail and wagged him to a log,  
And swore, by grab, it's a pretty fine hog.

You eat your ground hog, as we do not our badger; and you tan his hide for clothing. He must be good eating too.

They put him in a pot, and the children began to smile;  
They ate that ground hog before it struck a-boil.

Last came the turn of the coloured girl.

Up stepped Susie with a snigger and a grin,  
Ground hog grease all over her chin.

That is the eschatology of the ground hog.

'Sourwood Mountain' is a love-song, melodious, negro half-nonsense, with the love-pain, as always, underneath the foolishness. 'Noah's Ark'—

Down by the graveyard we must walk,  
See long graves as well as short.

Oh, who built the ark? Oh, Noah, Noah,  
Noah built the ark, Oh, yes, my Lord—

is the kind of thing over which negroes might sing or dance themselves mad. It is too fervent altogether for Americans or English. But there is 'Little Mohee' which is, I am sure, true to our nations at their best.

As I sat a-musing, myself on the grass,  
Oh, whom should I spy but an Indian lass?

She was the 'little Mohee' of the title, and her wooing, which was very innocent and very ardent at once, was in the fullness of time and the ballad rewarded. For when

The girl I had trusted proved untrue to me,  
I says, I'll turn back my courses over the sea.

I'll turn my courses, and backward I'll flee,  
I'll go spend my days with the little Mohee.

That is the way of it, and not only in Kentucky, where maids are kind and young men true and tender—at least in ballads.

## *Eutopia*

I SEE that the Trade Unionists have turned down the Communist uprising in their midst. Not that way therefore is our salvation to be expected for the moment, nor Utopia to be discerned with the letter before its name which makes all the difference. It is good testimony, as far as it goes, to Communism that nearly all visionary Commonwealths have been built upon it, but still better to the greatest of them, that one which is outlined in the New Testament, that it alone reads plausibly. The reason is plain. Men will not willingly forgo the chance of riches in this world unless they can be sure of them in another. The Revealer of the Gospel, in fact, did not omit human nature from his reckoning, as the Utopians have always done. Various, and sometimes comical, have been their shifts to manipulate that uncommonly tough product. As you read them one after another the same thing happens: human nature is always ‘breaking in’ to confound them. Sir Thomas More evaded rather than handled the difficulty by placing Utopia ‘beyond the line equinoctial’, somewhere between India and Brazil. Mr. Wells asked help of Heaven, and procured a Comet whose sanitary exhalations changed mankind from the roots. Civil War did for William Morris what it has never done yet for anybody else; and according to Edward Bellamy, ‘the change had been long foreseen. Public opinion had become fully ripe for it, and the whole mass of people was behind it.’ That has a comfortable sound. ‘Et de Charon pas un mot! ’

as Madame de Sévigné was fond of quoting. Nobody's head punched, nobody's throat cut! Unfortunately we know better. Alone among the nations of the world Russia has seen the theory of these dreamers put to work. Utopians in Moscow have spread communism by the sword, but human nature has been too strong for the sword. Moscow is under the heel of Lenin; but the peasants hold Russia.

The requisites for turning Utopia into Eutopia are religion and a small country. The proposals of the New Testament alone contain the first; all schemes without exception have the second. Plato's Republic would have been of Athenian dimensions, a territory about the size of Middlesex. Sir Thomas More's island was two hundred miles broad, and had five hundred miles total coast-line; Morris's Nowhere was, of course, England, apparently without Scotland; Bellamy looked backward to a United States which had shrunk to little more than Massachusetts. Harrington's model for Oceana (which by the way was not Communistic) was Venice. So it has proved in real life. The happiest countries within experience have been the smallest: Switzerland, the best democracy the world has yet seen; Denmark, the peasant farmer's paradise; Holland, Belgium, to name only those. I might pry curiously into the history of my own country, and ask whether, when England was called 'merry', it was not much of a size with those four; or I might look forward, rather, to see whether events in Britain are not actually tending that way. Decentralization is certainly going on, very markedly here. The great Dominions are self-sufficient, dominions only in name. India, Egypt, Malta are on the way to Dominion status, or beyond it. Ireland must inevitably be separated;

Scotland, Wales, can hardly be denied if they choose for independence. Nationality, far from having been obliterated by war, has been emphasized. There is no fear of our country's being too big for reform. The question is, will it have religion enough to justify reform, or be poor enough to make reform a necessity?

A Socialist and a Fabian wrote the other day that 'we were all communists at heart', and it is not hard to understand. Money, we see, is a cause of evil and misery. Do away with it, and evil and misery will vanish. It is an engaging fallacy. Or despise the precious minerals, as the Utopians did. Make gold the badge of your bondmen, give diamonds to the children to play with. No sane citizen will covet them then. True! but he will covet something else comprehended in the tenth Commandment. Money, after all, may be sacks of corn, or women, or white elephants, or white mice. The real reform would be not to want too much money, or (which follows) a monopoly in it. But that is a matter for religion alone—or, of course, for necessity. If men could be persuaded to Christianity in a way and to an extent to which they have never been persuaded yet, evangelical poverty would come in, and we might snap our fingers, if we wished to, at evangelical communism. For the truth of the matter is that poverty is the essential of happiness, and not communism. But poverty by choice is never likely to obtain in our country, though it easily might in Germany.

No. The poverty which we shall experience before long will be a poverty of necessity. I would rather that we had the other; but either will make for our happiness as a nation. It will mean that we must support ourselves, and every one of us work for his own living. Since we have

ruined the coal trade we shall have no raw material for export. We may pick up our carrying again ; and if we go properly to work we may have farm and dairy-produce to trade withal. Wool once more—why not ? But manufacture will leave us when the Capitalists do, and with them inevitably a large section of our artisan population. That will put us in a fair way to become what *News from Nowhere* reported us, a small pastoral and fishing community. A decently fertile soil and a relatively small population : that is my own idea of Eutopia. It was not William Morris's. He foresaw an upholsterer's paradise somehow or another, but never explained how we remained so rich. How, for instance, did his Golden Dustman provide himself with gold for his adornment ? Whence came the silken tissues, the wine and oil wherewith the neighbours made themselves glad ? These things can only be understood by supposing a liberal state of barter with other countries ; and as we used no money, that all other nations were in the same state of grace. But it doesn't matter. So long as England is England we shall have money, though luckily not very much, and everybody will work for his own hand.

Let us not deceive ourselves. Whatever is done in this country in the direction of Eutopia will be done by necessity ; for though we excel in practice, we have no theory and distrust those who profess it. Least of all have we any theory about the virtue resident in work. We have never worked but on compulsion, and assuredly we never shall. Fynes Moryson, a Lincolnshire man, the first of our people who travelled to improve his mind, and who did not know his countrymen the worse for having seen Europe from end to end, put his finger upon our sensitive

part. ‘It is a singularity in the nature of the English that they are strangely addicted to all kyndes of pleasure above all other nations.’ He put it down to idleness, not caring perhaps to go more deeply into the matter. It may be that he went deep enough. We are, indeed, mentally rather than physically idle. That is why we hate theory and are good at practice. Theory involves mental exercise, but practice saves it. Moryson notes also our love of sport. ‘No nation followeth these pastimes and exercises on horsebacke and on foote so frequently and paynfully in any measure of comparison. . . . Not only gentlemen but yeomen frequently hunt the hayre, not only with greyhounds, but hownds, in keeping whereof for that purpose divers yeomen joyne together; for England wants not Acteons eaten up by their owne dogs.’ A witty and a just obseruation. But a term has been set to all that. We shall have our Eutopia *malgré nous*,

## *The Wisdom of the Simple*

RELIGION catches our people sometimes and renders them capable of strange exaltations. In that state I have known men journey from cottage to cottage in the dark and, gaining an entrance, preach the second coming of the Lord to the occupants, who are mostly too ready for bed to pay much heed. And Lord or no Lord, say they, they have to be up before the sun in the morning. I have not known many conversions wrought by these Evangelists, but I have heard of no cases where they have been scorned or ridiculed. We treat them rather (and so they do in the East) as God-smitten persons in whom the divine seal must be respected. It is more common to find the enthusiasm which flames so fiercely further West—as in Cornwall—score for itself, with us, an ethical channel in men; and that is why with societies like the Primitive Methodists teetotalism has become an eleventh Commandment, and would even seem sometimes to be the only Commandment.

Ordinarily, so far as I see, religion takes its place as one of the smaller spiritual relaxations in village life, its use not very far removed from that of the tea-drinking which is such a stand-by of the housewife of our day that one cannot imagine what the people were like who knew nothing of it. Religion is really very much that same kind of solace and resource, and its recurrent practice, on Sunday evenings, as punctually observed as the five o'clock daily call. I should very much like to know if it was

ever very different—before the Reformation, for instance, when there were Mass, and miraculous images, and St. Christopher on the North wall, and the Doom in lurid red and sepia over the rood. To judge by the ballads and such mysteries as survive, our villagers lent themselves to the Church rather than were deeply in its debt. The Celtic strain in us, as you see it in Wales and Cornwall, may have known the raptures of Mariolatry. To be sure it did. But there is no hint of such experiences here. Now, at any rate, to shift my figure, we use religion as an outer garment, a cloak which we can throw on or off as the weather veers; but for our daily and intimate wear, to cover our moral nakedness, we have a philosophy. With no notion whatever of Zeno and Cleanthes and Epictetus, we are stoics in our simplicity. '*Lead me, O Zeus, and thou, Destiny, whithersoever ye have appointed me to go, and may I follow fearlessly. But if in an evil mind I be unwilling, still must I follow.*'

I know a man—not an old man either as men go here—who has lately found himself in the grip of a mortal disease. His heart, he has been told, is so affected that it may fail him at any moment. Nobody knows it better than he does, yet anybody can learn it in the hushed-down voice of him and in the patient watchfulness of his eyes. He is a widower, a childless man, has been so for fifteen years, living since his bereavement entirely alone. For fifteen years then he has risen at half-past four—being a carter by calling—lit his own fire, cooked his own breakfast, and gone forth to his labour. At noon he has cooked his own dinner;—at five he has been free, and at eight in bed. Now all that is changed, except the

loneliness ; and to that now is added idleness. He dares not walk at all, beyond furnishing, as he must, the simple needs of his house. Those done, he creeps out, if the weather is fair, to his gate and leans upon it, watching the hills and teams at work there, conversing in that still small voice of his with whomsoever will stop for a while. Or he will hoist himself with a stick into the churchyard and potter among the gravestones there, every one of which records a name as familiar to him as his own. A healthy, sane-living, slow, industrious man as he has been, he might have looked for another twenty years' activity : yet here he is marked down by the Grizzly One, and aware of it. You know it by the waiting look in his little bright eyes—clear yellow eyes, he has. What a life is that ! To move, lie down, rise up, see the brave sunlight spread abroad, and be yourself enfolded in a grey shadow, which moves as you move and settles down over you wherever you are.

Whenever I pass his way I stop and talk with him. My heart is charged with pity, but I don't think he needs it. He speaks of his symptoms with interest ; he realizes that he himself, standing as he is on the brink of the void, is an interesting person. But he is not concerned about it, nor terrified (as I know I should be) at the almost certain prospect of a lonely death. That is not at all on his mind, which runs wholly in the past. It is curious to notice how his august and constant companionship has added to his moral stature. He talks as if he were the patriarch of the village, though he would want nearly thirty years more to be so. He has acquired the garrulity and particularity of extreme old age ; will talk by the hour together of the place as he has known it, of where the mill used to stand, of old cottages pulled down, of old pastures plowed up ;

of how his mother brought up eight children on his father's nine shillings a week. It is not at all that he is insensible to his treadings ; he knows only too well how things are with him. The least worry or excitement, as he owns, puts him all in a shakement. But he accepts, he is of Zeno's band. *Pauvre et triste humanité !* Yes, but the Stoics make the best show for it.

The fact is that birth and death are equally your room-fellows if you live as these people do. Any one of us here will have slept with a corpse in the bed ; and there are few women who have been alone there during confinement. Such familiarity with natural process has its effect, makes one's own life a natural process, and the mind acquiescent. Every stroke, you may say, of nature drives tradition the deeper. A favourite tag of the essayist's can be refuted every day in the village. Our young men know very well that their turn must come, and have no false delicacy in talking of it. Two years ago, having bought a suitable piece of land, I planted an orchard. My gardener was interested, but could not understand that I was no less so. ‘Why, Sir,’ he said, ‘look at the time it will be before those trees come into bearing. You'll be hopping off, before you see your money back.’ I might be, no doubt, but I planted as an amateur. After all I had done nothing compared with that famous old Dean of Chichester who, at ninety-three, insisted with his daughter that she should collect and plant for him the seed of a Himalayan rhododendron which he had espied in a friend's garden.

Acquiescence in the inevitable end of us all does not hinder the cry of wounded love when it comes. Men and women cry easily, for each other, even for themselves, and

grief will take all forms except that of vocal expression. Emotion seems to seal the fountain of speech with them, and when it is of sorrow is the worse to see for its petrifaction. It is because it is maimed, as it were, of half its outlet that it takes sometimes strange and terrible shapes. I knew a young woman whose first baby was born with the doom upon it. It was a war-baby, and all the time she was carrying it the mother had been fretting for her husband in France. It flickered for a fortnight, then simply faded out like a candle flame. She would not leave it lying, but had it on her knees all day, in her bed at night. So she spent her grief. When they came to lay it in its little coffin, she kissed it once, but did not follow to the grave. Next morning I saw her at her daily work as usual. She would speak of it if needs were, and with few tears, but never forgot it, and never has forgotten. She has others now, but always reckons that first as one of the tale. She will tell you she has four children, as Wordsworth's cottage maid said 'We are seven'. But that reckoning looks before as well as behind. I once asked a boy in Tuscany how many brothers and sisters he had; 'Momenti siamo sette,' he answered. 'We shall be seven in a minute.' He knew all about it. Village children do.

## *The Peasant in Church*

A letter from Mr. James Ismay upon the vagaries of Anglicanism in *The Times* led me to consider, not his difficulties, which, inasmuch as they could be voiced, were not without balm, but those rather of the voiceless in the villages. What is the attitude of the peasant towards ritual? How does he relate it to doctrine? How does either affect his conduct? Mr. Ismay complained of variation in church practice, and very reasonably said that in a village where there is but one church, whatever the practice may be, it must be a matter of plain 'take it or leave it' for the church-goers. 'It is hard', he went on, 'for those in small country parishes to adapt their religious views to the convictions of the priest or clergyman; the average church-goer desires moderation, and dislikes ornate vestments and excessive genuflections.' Living as I do in a neighbouring county, I am confident that he spoke fairly for the villager of the West of England, whose religious practice is determined by tradition and use, and to whom dogma is of small account. In people who rule their lives by habit any religion can be induced if you begin early enough and go on long enough. The break with Rome, we should say, has been as summary as any break could be. Yet wherever you find a great Catholic house you will find small Catholic cottages round about it, whose numbers slowly increase as time goes on. Education and continuity make sure of that; and to help them there is always the appeal to history which will illuminate

somebody or other as by a ‘sudden glory’—and the rest is easy. The Church of England, while it may have gained by its release from the yoke, has missed those great auxiliaries. Doctrine and practice may vary with the incumbent. The ‘minister’ and the ‘priest’ are both-named in the prayer-book, but the villager will be bewildered if he have first only the one and next only the other. At first bothered by ‘excessive genuflections’, and next irritated, he will presently abstain from church-going.

Nothing is more difficult, and few things in history are more interesting, than to conclude what the attitude of the peasant has been towards religion and religious practice. Did he help to build, was it his call which built, the great, airy, well-ordered churches, say, of the Fen country? Was his the hand which laboured, his the eye which desired, the lovely ornament you see in the Cotswold churches? Did he and his likes claim, or ever fill, the one-and-twenty fine churches of the Avon valley which, in Cobbett’s time, existed for the needs of two thousand and eighty people? My belief is that he both built his church and attended it, in each case because he was bidden. I think that he heard Mass, took the Sacrament, went on pilgrimages, constrained by use and wont; and that he listened gladly to sermons whenever he could get them. I don’t doubt that he kept the fasts as well as the feasts, paid Church-scot and partook Church-ales; but I believe that he was at all times in strict relation to his priest, seldom a better man, and generally a worse one. What the priest often was, what he sometimes was, we can learn from various scandalized pens as well as from scandalous—from Walter Mapes, Nicholas Bozon, Chaucer, Langland, Wyclif, and the author of *Gammer Gurton’s Needle*. But

what are we to think of church-goers whose common term for the Sacrament of the altar was 'Jack-in-the-Box'? *Gammer Gurton's Needle* is instructive. It can hardly be earlier than 1550; yet it shows us a Catholic England.

Dame Chat her deare gossyp this needle had found;  
Yet knew shee no more of this matter (alas !)  
Than know'ſt Tom our Clarke what the Priest saith at  
masse

is one of many casual references in it. A gross and trivial piece of buffoonery, full of sculduddery, one puts it down with the feeling that its author knew his village and his peasantry, and that they cannot have been better instructed or gentlier living than he makes them out.

What they made of the Elizabethan settlement there's no telling now. Did they see Madonna go without a tear? If one did not know their vast patience and their power of silence it would be hard to believe. How did they consider of the Presbyterian interlude? Here and there one of them was touched by Quakerism and fed the Inner Light:

'In the beginning of the year 1655, I was at the plough in the east parts of Yorkshire in Old England . . . and, as I walked after the plough, I was filled with the love and presence of the living God, which did ravish my heart when I felt it, for it did increase and abound in me like a living stream, so did the life and love of God run through me like a precious ointment giving a pleasant smell, which made me to stand still. . . .'

That is Marmaduke Stevenson, hanged in Massachusetts for his opinions in 1658. Except for the like of that, Nonconformity did not touch the peasantry until John Wesley took to the road. Then it smote them hip and thigh,

and ran like wildfire through the West. The farm-hands of both sexes used to meet in the open field in the dark. They joined hands in prayer, they sang ; they had their *Agapés*, their ecstasies of more than one kind. Faith was exemplified ; works did not always respond. Yet who shall say that Fielding's picture of the Seagrim family—Molly was a church-goer, as we know—presents a better state of affairs than Lackington's of the Methodists' pious orgies ; of the 'spiritual dairy-maid' whom he married, and who died presently 'in enthusiastic rant, surrounded with methodist preachers' ?

A moving picture of the Wiltshire poor in the next century is given in *Memorials of a Quiet Life*, the endearing record furnished of the lives of Augustus and Maria Hare by the adopted son of the latter. Augustus Hare, brother of the redoubtable Julius, was appointed to the living of Alton-Barnes in 1829, and served the cure through the rick-burnings and machine-breakings of 1830, that terrible year. In 1831 Maiia Hare met one Richard Douse, a Baptist who had been suddenly converted :

'I asked him what caused him to think seriously. "Why, it was one day when I was working for Mr. Pile's father ; there were many of us, and we were talking of dying. I said I was not afraid of death, why should I ? I had not been cursing and swearing, nor doing as many did. I always went to church and did nobody any harm. The next day it came over me all at once. . . . I was out in the field. I had beat away my wife and mother that I might go and pray, when all of a sudden it did seem to I as if I heard a voice say in my ears, 'The Blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin' ; and in that minute it seemed just as if two great hefts of wheat were lifted off my back".'

Augustus Hare was 'high church' in his way of 1830. He observed the feasts and fasts, had weekly services in Lent, and so on. But he was not a ritualist, and was, on the other hand, that one thing for sake of which village people will overlook even 'excessive genuflections'. He was, to wit, a good plain preacher; and good plain preaching is what the villager has always desiderated and too seldom obtained. He gets the best preaching in chapel; accordingly the best of him is a chapel-goer. He is no sacramentalist; imagination fails him. Least of all has he a sympathetic or an historical imagination. It is rare for him to be touched by the *Quod semper, quod ubique* argument which appeals so directly to the priest. If touched by it at all, he is guided by it Romewards, not to his parish-church; nor is he at any pains to understand what has inspired the mind and heart of the young man who changes all the ancient ways, puts a confessional in the side-chapel and an ever-burning lamp in the sanctuary. Rome does it to-day because she did it yesterday. The peasant understands that argument. But his young Vicar found it out in a book.

## *The Letter-Writers*

THE judgement of so stored a mind as Mr. Saintsbury's upon any efflorescence of literature is important. He knows the law, the ropes, the lie of the ground—however you choose to put it. But when he opens upon letter-writing he brings us into an uncharted sea. There is no canon of criticism there: artist or critic, you go as you please. All that you can steer by is your instinct, or your taste. There is a standard of taste for every expression of man's feeling; and Mr. Saintsbury is so well aware of it that he is entitled to take it or break it as he will. I don't know that there is any elder now pontificating to whom I should more readily defer than to him, unless it be Professor Ker. Professor Ker's prejudices may be the deeper rooted, but they are (partly on that account) the less swayed by passion. I feel that Mr. Saintsbury is a good hater, but dare affirm he is the better lover for that. In his *Letter Book*<sup>1</sup> he has been properly provocative—with a sting on every page; and what more need one say?

There is no art more apt for personal judgement than that of letter-writing, for there is no other art in itself so personal. What makes it so in particular is that it is privy to two instead of one; and that sets it off from all other kinds of writing. The reaction of the multitude upon the artist is different in kind as well as in degree from that of the individual. The world at large hears the poet even when he addresses Maecenas or Maria Gisborne, and he is

<sup>1</sup> *A Letter Book*: Bell and Sons, 1922.

well aware of it. Even if he indite a sonnet to his mistress's eyebrow one of his own is cocked to the passengers about her. So, too, with 'Discourse upon our Present Disscontents, in a Letter to a Noble Lord', where his lordship is no more than a stalking-horse. The letter which is written with an eye on the general (even if it be the posthumous general) betrays itself. It takes a forensic spread, cannot avoid the rhetorician's gesture. It is as if a man should write a tragedy for Drury Lane. He frames his periods to the echo. Good letters may have been written on those terms, as good tragedies may have been written for Drury Lane (though their names escape me); but they are not *in pari materia* with private letters, and cannot lie beside them. Three-quarters of his way through life Stevenson discovered that his letters might be copy; and they were—and good copy. But they ceased to be such good letters. The community of interest was violated and perhaps there was no going back. It has been charged against Walpole (and I see that Mr. Saintsbury suspects him) that his punctiliousness in securing the return of his letters to Mann was to ensure their publication. Personally I don't believe it, because I fail to detect any tarnish upon their naturalness. He was all his long life engaged upon memoirs of his times, and needed them for that purpose. There is no consciousness in the letters themselves that any other eye than his correspondent's was upon them, or to be so.

One of the great charms of the letter as a piece of art is that double personality involved. Practitioner and patient act and react. Observe how Mme. de Sévigné attunes her pen. Always delightful, she reserves the best of her malice for Bussy, of her wit for Mme. de Lafayette, of her heart

for her daughter, of her delicate reserve for M. de Guitault. One would like her letters to the Cardinal de Retz. She loved and, oddly enough, revered that Eminence. The desire to please should have been beautifully evident there. So also Lamb was always at his wildest when writing to Manning, finding something in the sage to egg him on. Wordsworth, not surprisingly, provoked him to irony ; but Coleridge had his heart. It was only to him that Lamb wrote freely of himself. The same thing is noticeable in Gray, never perfectly natural to any one but Thomas Wharton. He wrote to Bonstetten as to a beloved child ; to Mason as from an indulgent uncle ; to Wharton as an equal. Gray comes next to Cowper, I think, in excellence ; but you can read in him the sentences of a man who disapproved of himself. Cowper, who in charm and translucency of wit is the nearest we have to Mme. de Sévigné, is at his most winning in his letters to Lady Hesketh. The situation with her was delicate. She was the sister of his old flame, not far perhaps from being herself a new flame. He never overstepped the modesty of his nature ; yet never said less than he ought. Britain has bred no truer gentleman than Cowper.

If Cowper was a true gentleman, Horace Walpole was a fine one, much too fine to betray it. He could snub with severity—witness his extinguishment of Mason when the time was ripe. But he did it, not *en grand seigneur*, but as a man of common sense. Though Mason had forgotten himself, Walpole did not. Perhaps he could not. For all his republicanism, he was very conscious of his rank, a Whig through and through. But I cannot remember any instance of his using his rank to crush a bore or an impudent. Now Byron wrote with intolerable insolence to

Murray, and could hardly keep patronage out of his letters to Tom Moore. How he galled the kibes of the unfortunate Hunt the victim has declared.

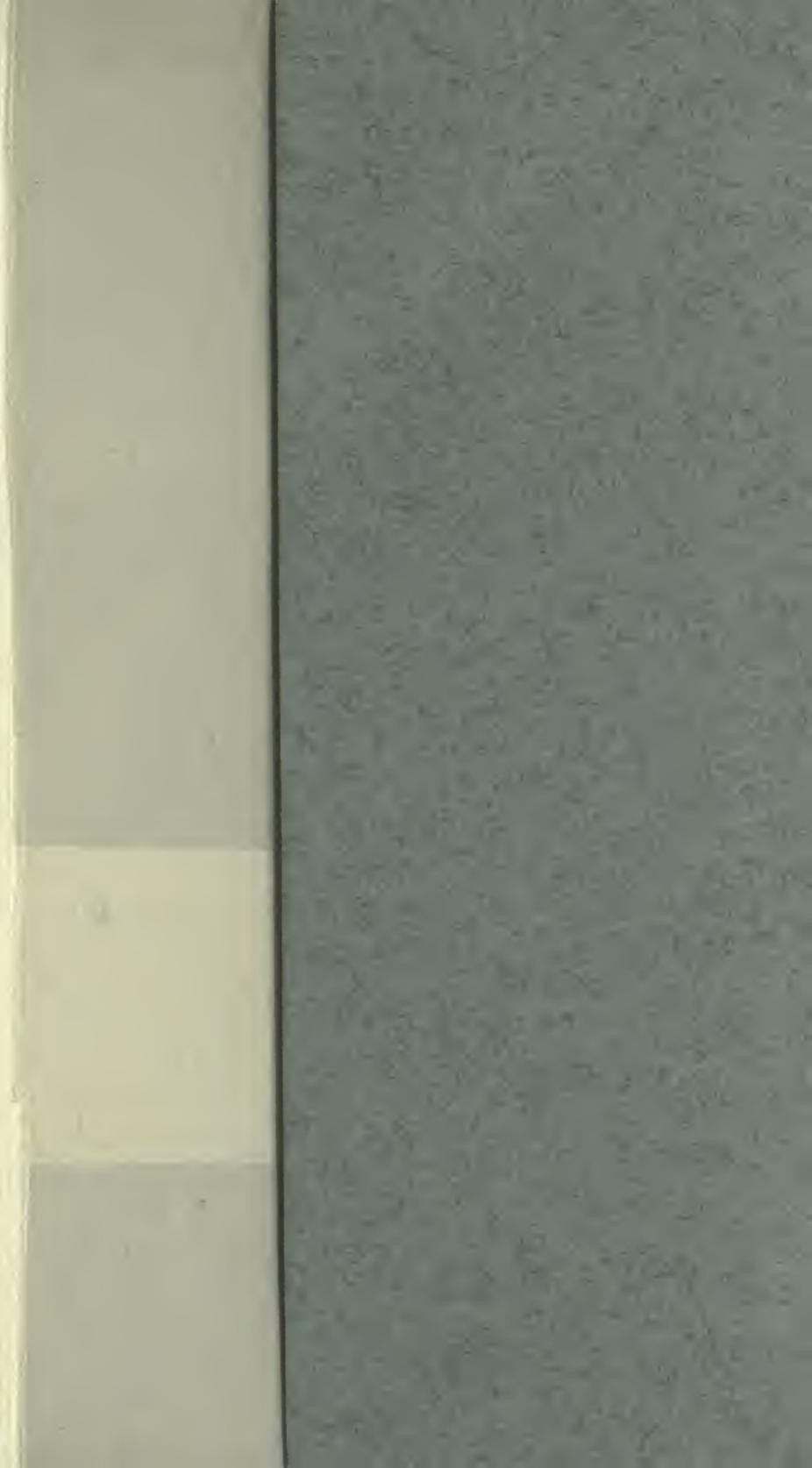
What are the properties of a good letter-writer, then, genius apart, and a good correspondent implied? Leisure and love of the art are of course; self-esteem and the desire to please, obvious. Esteem of the correspondent follows. No artist has ever succeeded who despised his audience. Byron, it may be said, succeeded, and did despise his audience. But I doubt his success; at best he was only second-best. He produces restlessness in the reader, disease. The fact is that he was a *cabotin* in grain, and would have postured before his shoebblack if he could not get another looking-glass. You must be able to depend upon your letter-writer to this extent, at least, that he believes what he is telling you at the moment. With Byron you could not. One other requisite of excellence there does seem to be, if only because it was nearly always there, and that is *an ache*. As a grain of flint to the oyster, so is unhappiness to the poet, or an ache to the letter-writer. Our best have been unhappy or discontented men. Swift comes first. Mr. Saintsbury calls him 'one of the unhappiest lovers in the world'. What sort of a lover he was I cannot say at the moment; but there can be no doubt of the misery in which he passed his days. The problem in Swift's touching 'Journal to Stella' is how he could have had the heart to keep it up, as he did, while he was 'carrying on' with Vanessa in town. But he did it—and you can feel it trembling underneath. But to pursue. Cowper despaired, Gray disapproved of himself. Mme. de Sévigné longed; she was permanently an-hungered. Lamb was a haunted man, hag-ridden by ever-present fear.

Thackeray was sorrow-stricken ; FitzGerald, deeply dissatisfied with the ‘innocent *far niente* life’ which Carlyle found so tolerable in him, cannot be called happy. Carlyle himself, his tormented wife ; and again (to return to him) Byron. Those are our best, and all unhappy, or disgruntled. Walpole is out, Chesterfield is out, Lady Granville is out. Good as they are, they are not of our very best. The texture is too hard, too metallic. The wit has the glitter of a diamond. There is no dew. What is wanting ? Heart.

I don’t speak now of love-letters. Those are not art at all, or if they are, the worse love-letters they. But with letter-writers generally the fact does seem to be that unhappiness, or at least discontent, has shed a bloom upon their letters which ambition or the desire to please could hardly have given them. Does not Cowper’s wistful smile betray him, with his doom impending ? Is not Gray’s leucocholy pervasive ? Mme. de Sévigné’s heartache, Carlyle’s stomach-ache, Jane Carlyle’s bitterness——? *Sunt lacrimae rerum*, indeed. These things tell. At least, they lie hidden in the pearl.



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